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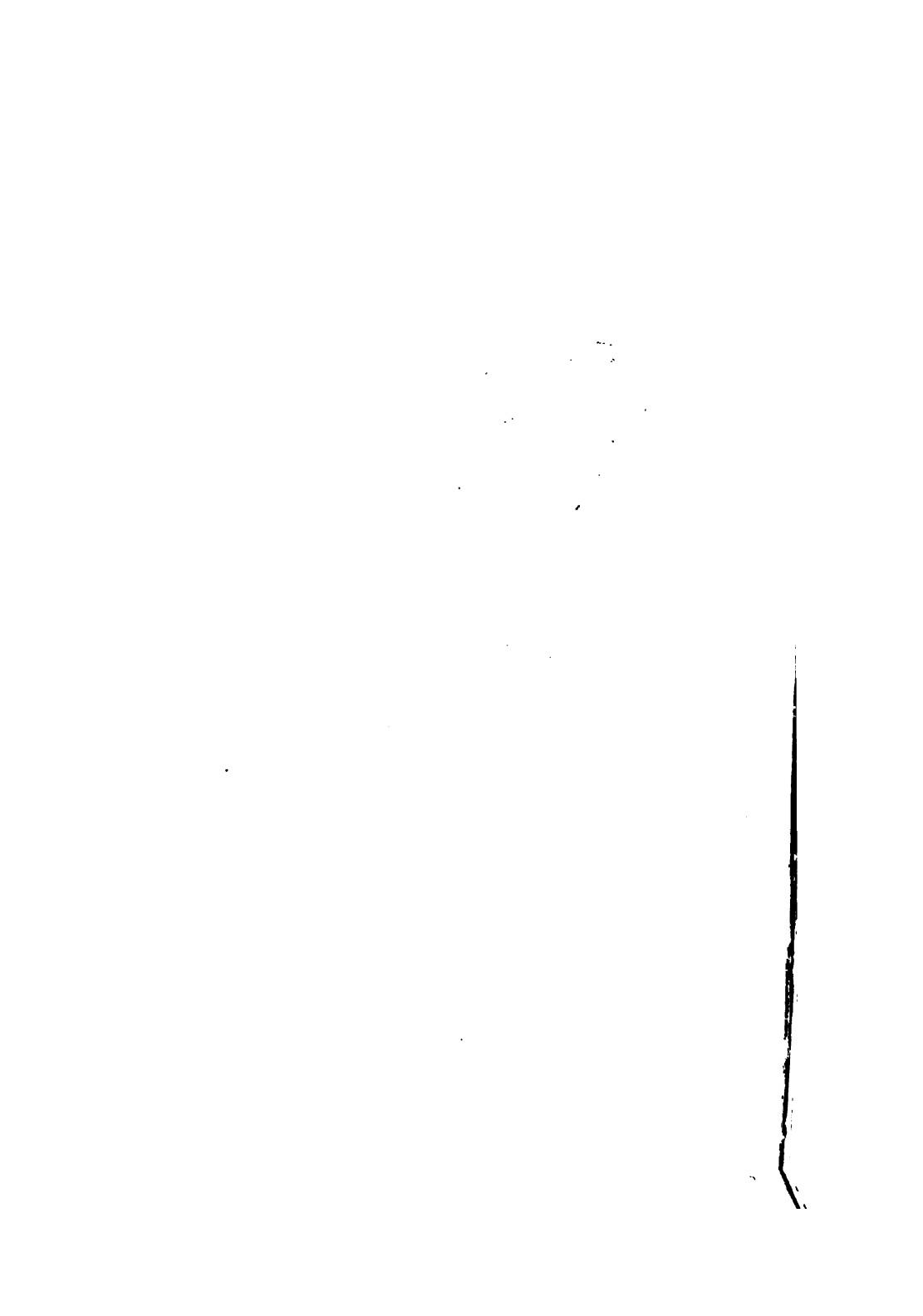
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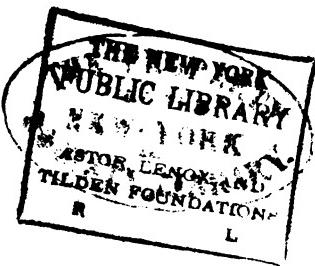


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HIS LITTLE WORLD







THE STORM BROUGHT SNOW AND SLEET TO BLIND
THE TIREDLESS WHEELSMAN

HIS LITTLE WORLD

THE STORY OF HUNCH BADEAU

By

Samuel Merwin

Author of "The Road to Frontenac;" Joint-Author
of "Calumet K," etc.

Illustrated

BY

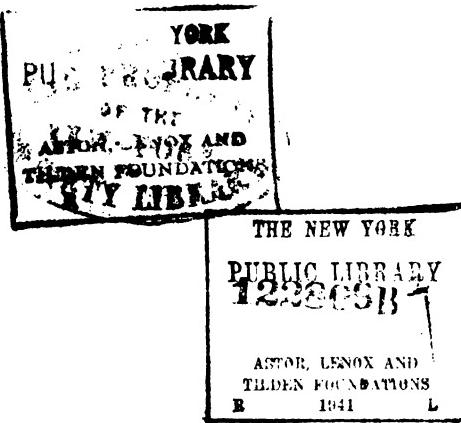
Alonzo Kimball

NEW YORK

A. S. BARNES & COMPANY

1903

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Published in September, 1903

OCT 1 1969

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To
H. B. M.



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CHAPTER I

THE MEETING

THE life-saving crew were giving an exhibition drill. A number of people, mostly women and children, were scattered about the beach (for since the failure of the lumber and salt, that had expanded Liddington into a city with four paved streets, the only important events were band concerts and crew drills). Four girls in white-and-pink dresses, which did not agree with their piled-up hats and fringed parasols, stood on the sand.

Hunch Badeau commanded a square-nosed lumber schooner, the *Ed. C. Dean*, which was just big enough to carry her two masts. He had come in that morn-

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ing with a picked-up cargo of merchandise from Milwaukee, unloaded it, and now leaving Billy, the boy, in charge of the schooner, was lounging up the beach with Bruce Considine, who made up the rest of the crew. Hunch had been christened John, after a long line of John, and, earlier, Jean Badeaus, the first of whom had probably appeared on the Lakes in a birch canoe. Hunch showed few traces of his ancestry, excepting his black hair and an easily aroused flash in his eyes. He was big, and he stooped a little, as if doorways and cabin ceilings were too low for him.

"There she is," said Bruce, pointing toward the white - and - pink group. "That's her—the little one. She ain't bigger'n a minute."

Badeau looked critically at the group, then walked toward them.

"Hold on a minute, Hunch."

THE MEETING

"What for? Come along. I ain't seen a girl in weeks."

"Don't go over yet. I ain't told her about you."

"That's nothing. I guess she knows who I am."

They stood near the girls, but fixed their eyes on the drill. After a moment, Bruce glanced around at the little girl. She threw him a smile, and he said, "Hello, Mame."

"Her father's boss of the bridge gang on the Pere Marquette," he confided to Badeau, who was edging closer to the group.

"Wonder if they're going to do the upset drill," Badeau said, in a loud voice.

The girls giggled, and one said boldly, "Won't it be fun if they upset the boat?" After this sign of favor they blushed, Then for several minutes each party carried on a conversation intended for

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the ears of the other, meanwhile drawing nearer. At length Considine found himself at Mamie's side. Her elbow brushed against his.

"Who's your friend?" she asked.

Considine stepped back, thus including Badeau in the group.

"Hunch Badeau," he said, "shake hands with Mame Banks."

Mamie introduced them to the other girls, who were still giggling. Then Badeau said to Mamie:

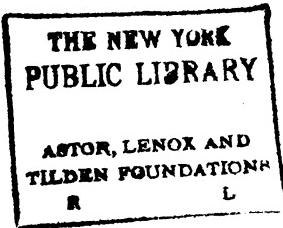
"Let's get over to the pier before the crowd gets all the good places."

The party moved slowly toward the life-saving station, Considine walking behind with the other three girls, and trying to show his freedom from jealousy by jostling them playfully off the sidewalk.

It took Badeau and Mamie some time to get into a conversation. Then they talked about Considine.



IT TOOK SOME TIME TO GET INTO A CONVERSATION



THE MEETING

"He's a fine fellow," said Badeau. "Best man I ever had. Reg'lar as New Years." This was not entirely true, but it seemed a nice thing to say. He saw that it pleased her, so he went on, with a wink, "You like him pretty well, don't you?"

"Oh, I don't know's I do."

"Well, I guess he likes you, anyhow."

"Oh, no, he don't."

"How do you know he don't?"

"Cause I don't care one way or t' other."

"You don't, eh?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, I guess there's lots of girls that does."

"Oh, I s'pose he's all right."

After a silence Mamie glanced shyly up at him.

"Say, you're a friend of his, ain't you? You won't tell him what I say?"

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"Should say not!" said Badeau, feeling in advance a little embarrassed. Mamie poked at the sand with her parasol as they walked.

"Well—folks say he drinks."

"Who says so?"

"Jess Bartlett's brother told Jess."

Badeau's eyes flashed.

"He's a dam' liar!"

"O—oh," faltered Mamie.

There was a long silence. Then Badeau said, "Excuse me," and looked out over the water with a scared face. The girls who had played a part in his life had not objected to profanity. When he had gathered enough courage to look again at her, there was an expression on her face that puzzled him. He did not know that he had pleased as well as startled her. Soon they were at the pier and were talking more easily. To sit by her, and to watch her bright eyes and her

THE MEETING

fresh coloring, pleased Hunch in a way that he did not try to understand. He had such a good time that he forgot Bruce, who was struggling to make conversation with the other girls. When at last he went back to the schooner, he was thoughtful. She seemed too good for Bruce.

In the afternoon Badeau took on a short cargo of hemlock cribbing, and worked laboriously out of the sand-locked harbor and through the channel between the long breakwaters. He could not afford a tug.

The next morning they lay at the wharf in Manitowoc. They ate their supper in silence, the three of them about the table in the dirty cabin. When they had finished, and Billy was cleaning up the dishes, Badeau lighted his pipe and stretched out in his bunk. Considine was changing his clothes.

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“Where’re you going?”

“There’s a dance up at the hall.”

“You going?”

“Thought I might.”

“Say, Bruce, you got to quit drink-ing.”

“Who’s drinking?”

“That’s all right, you got to quit, right now. If you come back to-night with a drop aboard, I’ll knock it out of you.”

Considine hurried out nervously.

From ten till two that night Badeau sat on the rail and scanned the road across the wharf. Billy was below asleep. It was a little after two when three figures came down the street, arm in arm, singing a song that could never be popular except in a lumber region. They stood on the wharf for a long time, hugging one another and shaking hands. Then one stumbled toward the schooner,

THE MEETING

calling out, "Goo' night! Goo' night!" He came slowly across the wharf. He knew from past experience the probability of a plunge overboard unless he aimed carefully at the schooner.

A dark figure sat on the rail.

"Goo' night," said Considine. He skillfully lowered himself to the deck. "Say, ol' man, ain' mad, are you? Don' be mad." He tried to touch Badeau's shoulder, but missed it. Hunch rose, gripped his arm, and jerked him clear of the deck. Considine fell on his back and looked up vaguely. Then Hunch hammered him until he showed signs of returning to his senses, and finished him off with a bucket of water. At last, Considine, limp and crushed, sat on the cabin roof and breathed remorse.

"That's all right," said Hunch. "Told you I'd knock it out of you, and I'll do it again, too. This is where you quit

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drinking. Understand?" And he knocked him down the gangway, and sat out on the deck for a long time alone. He was thinking, not of Bruce, but of the girl with the blue eyes, who was startled when he swore.

CHAPTER II

ON THE BEACH

AT Manitowoc they picked up a load of laths and shingles, consigned to Grand Haven, and from there they went down to St. Joe, so that it was nearly a week before they returned to Liddington. During this time Bruce slunk about, working hard and drinking water.

On Saturday they lay ten miles off Liddington in a hazy calm. Billy, who was usually overworked as a matter of course, stretched out forward and went to sleep on the deck. Badeau sat on the rail by the wheel, grumbling—as a man will who has no resources within himself to turn idle hours to account. Bruce

HIS LITTLE WORLD

whittled a shingle. After a long time Badeau spoke.

"Look here, Bruce. What you going to do about that girl?"

"I dunno."

"Don't be a fool. Do you want to marry her?"

"She wouldn't have me."

"Say, look here. Why don't you ask her?"

"I've been thinking, Hunch—"

"We're going to lie up to-morrow."

"I can't do it soon as that."

"Course you can."

Bruce hesitated, and snapped shavings with his thumb.

"Say, Hunch, you know more about girls 'n I do. Don't you s'pose you could kind of—talk to her just a little—"

"No, I couldn't. You go round there to-morrow, understand."

"I ain't going to do that, Hunch—"

ON THE BEACH

"You tell me you ain't and I'll break your head!" Badeau stood over Bruce, who was fumbling with his knife. "Who's captain of this schooner, me or you? When I say, you got to do it, it ain't none of your business whether you want to or not. Understand?"

Toward noon, on Sunday, they slid in between the breakwaters, and beat across the harbor to the wharf. Badeau kept a close watch on Bruce, confining him to the schooner all day. At dusk, dressed in his best, which included a rhinestone stud, Bruce started out. Hunch had supervised every detail of the toilet, and had forced on Bruce his own red tie, which he preferred to Bruce's checked one. Now he walked sternly alongside.

Mamie lived in a cottage a short distance from the freight yard. A rod from the gate Bruce rebelled, but Hunch gripped his arm, and marched him up

HIS LITTLE WORLD

the steps. Then he left him and stood outside the fence. Bruce laid his hand on the bell-knob, but before ringing looked wildly around and started to tiptoe away. Hunch made a motion, and he turned back and rang. Then the door opened and he disappeared within. Hunch sat on the horse-block.

Half an hour later the door opened. Hunch retreated across the street. Bruce and Mamie came out and walked slowly, arm in arm, toward the lake. Hunch stole after, keeping in the shadows.

They walked across the beach and sat on the sand. Hunch looked over the ground, and, making sure that they could not get away without his knowledge, he went back up the beach to the end of the sidewalk and paced nervously up and down for an hour. Then he slipped behind the willows and looked again. He saw first a single shadow on the sand,

ON THE BEACH

then two people who were lost to all the material and earthly things of this life. They sat in silence, her head pillow'd on his shoulder, his arm a black stripe across the back of her pink shirt-waist. Hunch walked swiftly back to the schooner.

He was in his bunk, pretending to be asleep, when Bruce came stamping down the steps into the cabin. He watched Bruce as he lighted the lamp. Bruce was grinning. After puttering about the table, he came over to Hunch's bunk and stood looking down at him. Then he laughed out loud and dug his fingers into Hunch's ribs.

"Get out of here," Hunch growled.

"Say, Hunch, wake up! It's all right. We're going to be married next month."

"Glad to hear it," said Hunch, drowsily. Then he rolled over, feeling less enthusiasm than he had expected. Bruce whis-

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tled while he was undressing, and played catch with one of his shoes. Hunch could hear him chuckling after he got to bed and the light was out.

After that, whenever they touched at a city, Bruce would hurry up to the post-office, and would usually have on his return a perfumed letter, addressed in a slanting hand. He carried these in his pocket and re-read them frequently. His spare time was spent in writing replies with a stubby, chewed pencil.

CHAPTER III

THE CALL

TEN days before the wedding, they were lying at Manistee, waiting for a load of salt. Bruce had been growing more restless and absent-minded. The fault grew unchecked, because an instinctive fineness in Hunch held back the reproof that would ordinarily have followed slipshod work. But about the time of the Manistee trip, Bruce appeared in a new light. He was growing self-confident and independent. The old meekness was giving place to a certain animal pride.

The last night at Manistee, Bruce went uptown to buy a present for Mamie. He met an old friend on the street and told him of his luck. This called for

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congratulations, and in the confidence of his new strength Bruce followed his friend through a swinging, green baize door. He returned at eleven o'clock. Hunch was in the cabin, wrestling with his accounts.

Bruce came slowly down the steps and balanced carefully at the bottom.

"Hello, Hunsh," he said, slyly.

Badeau looked up. Bruce walked across the cabin and sat on his bunk, holding his head erect and looking straight before him.

"Where you been?"

"See a fren'."

Badeau looked at him. Bruce grew so nervous that he forgot his caution.

"What's matter? What you lookin' me like that for? You're fren' o' mine, Hunch. Shake han's, ol' man. Shake——"

Badeau struck him without a word. Bruce showed fight, and in a moment

THE CALL

they were rolling about the floor. Billy, up forward, heard the noise, and, tip-toeing along the deck in his underclothes, peered down the open gangway. He saw Bruce, his face red with drink and rage, break away from Badeau and seize a knife from the rack on the bulkhead. Badeau sprang forward. The table was jammed into the stove. Then the light went out. There was a fall, then a silence. Billy groped cautiously down the gangway.

"That you, Billy?" came in Badeau's voice. "Get a match. Guess I smashed him pretty hard."

As soon as he and Billy could get Bruce undressed and into his bunk, Hunch ran for a doctor. Bruce finally went to sleep with a stitched-up scalp, a purple eye, and a broken rib. In the morning they got underway for Liddington, Billy and Hunch doing all the work. Bruce

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was quiet during the morning, but in the afternoon, and after they reached Liddington, he started several times to blurt out an apology, which Hunch each time cut short. At supper-time, Hunch propped him up with blankets.

"Say, Hunch, I s'pose you ain't got nothing to say to me."

"Guess not."

"Well, say, Hunch, I—got a date with her to-night; I ain't fit to ever see her again, but—she'll wonder why I don't come. Say, you go up there, Hunch. Come on. Tell her I'm sick."

So Hunch went. And when he sat stiffly in the parlor (in Bruce's checked tie, for fear that she might recognize the red one), he wished himself miles away, or dead and buried, and he wondered what he could say. But after a while Mamie came in, blushing. His tongue tripped over her name, and they both laughed.

THE CALL

"S'pose you're s'prised to see me," he said.

"Why—I don't know. I'm always glad to see you, Mr. Badeau."

Hunch blushed.

"Say, Bruce's sick."

"Oh—really?"

"Yes—oh, it's all right. Nothing very bad. He'll be around in a day or two. But I guess he thought you'd feel bad if you didn't know why he didn't show up."

During the silence that followed Hunch winked at her knowingly, and she blushed again.

"Most ready for the wedding," he said, intending to cover her confusion; but for some reason she grew more distressed. "Let's see," he went on, talking rapidly, "it's coming pretty soon now, ain't it? Next Friday, eh? Well, say, we've got to be at Milwaukee Thursday morning, but I told Bruce we'd get back here Fri-

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day afternoon if it took the sticks clean out of the old *Dean*. And we will, too. Sorry I've got to lose Bruce. He's going in with your old man, ain't he?"

Already he was beginning to feel at ease. He liked to talk to this girl who looked shyly at him, and who was pleased when he told her of Bruce. This latter fact led him on until he found himself talking enormously about Bruce's courage and resource and kindness of heart, telling her in Bruce's name a large part of his own personal history. And at length, when he paused for breath in a glow of falsehood, and saw the light dancing in her eyes, and her eager smile, he felt a thousand times repaid.

It was after a very long stay that he rose to go. She followed him to the door, and stood for the moment on the porch.

"Mr. Badeau," she said, "Bruce has

THE CALL

told me about you; how kind you've been to him. And I've wanted to thank you myself. You'll be our friend, won't you, after—" she said it bravely—"after we're married. And you'll come and see us real often."

Then she suddenly reached up, far up on her tiptoes, and while he stood looking down, she kissed him on the cheek and fled indoors.

CHAPTER IV

HUNCH'S WEDDING

THURSDAY morning, a day and a half before the hour set for the wedding, they lay at a wharf in Milwaukee River, ready to sail. The sky was heavy and a roaring wind blew from the lake. Half a dozen steamers and two schooners had made the harbor since daybreak, and each had a story of hard struggling with wind and sea, stories which spread rapidly along the river, causing more than one outbound captain to shake his head, and resolve to wait a few hours or a day longer.

Hunch had gone out to the life-saving station at the pier, and now at eight o'clock he stood looking at the tumbling white rollers that came on squarely be-

HUNCH'S WEDDING

tween the piers and ran far up into the channel before they were spent. On the horizon a row of schooners, barges, and freighters were holding their noses against the sea, until it should be safe to run for the harbor. A little nearer a big whaleback was tossing and rolling badly. One of the crew men watched her through a glass. A few tugs hung about inside the basin, looking for a stray job at advanced rates.

Hunch, after looking it all over, chartered a tug, then returned to the schooner, where Bruce and Billy were waiting. He and Bruce had not been talkative of late.

"Get everything tight, Bruce," he said, jumping down upon the deck. "We're going out in half an hour."

"How about it, Hunch? Can we make it, think?"

Hunch did not trouble to reply, and

HIS LITTLE WORLD

Bruce, as he worked along the deck, watched him nervously.

Before the tug appeared, Hunch went ashore and crossed the wharf to a saloon at the corner. He returned with a jug, which he put in his bunk where the bedding would protect it when the schooner got to pitching. He sometimes drank whisky to steady his nerves when fighting a heavy sea. In a few minutes the tug came alongside.

"Everything fast, Bruce?"

Bruce grunted, and Billy lifted the lines off the snubbin' posts and followed them aboard.

They went out in tow, on a long hawser and under bare poles. When they were half a mile beyond the piers, wrenching and slapping through the seas, and shipping a deck-load from every second wave, Bruce came groping back to Hunch, who had the wheel.

HUNCH'S WEDDING

"How much farther are they going to take us, Hunch?" He had to shout to get his voice over the wind. "They'll be sticking us for a big bill."

"None o' your business," growled Hunch.

"I'd like to know why not. We're going back on my account."

"Shut up! I'm paying for this tow. Go up forward where you belong. Send Billy back."

When Billy appeared, working along the rail and bracing his feet when a wave came over, he said, "Bring up that jug in my bunk." Billy brought it up and lashed it to the rail within Hunch's reach. Hunch began to drink.

After a time he shouted to Bruce, who, with Billy's help, set to work on the sails. Both were cold from the duckings, and Bruce was in addition too excited to be of much use. Between them

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they bungled until Hunch lost his patience and, yelling to Bruce to take the wheel, he ran up the heaving deck and throwing his weight on the halyards, raised the foresail single-handed. Billy timidly watched him, expecting that he would reef heavily, but when he saw everything but the topsails go up flat, he looked around at the tug which was holding them up in the wind, then at Hunch who was making fast the mainsail peak; and then Billy, who was plucky enough on occasion, swallowed a lump in his throat, and turning forward, crossed himself hurriedly as he stood clinging to the weather-stays.

They cut loose from the tug and swung off a few points, the schooner shivering and straining as she caught the wind, then heeling over with a rush. Hunch went storming back to the wheel. Bruce was wiping his mouth on his sleeve,

HUNCH'S WEDDING

bracing the wheel with one knee. The cork was out of the jug, and a little whiskey slopped out at each lurch of the schooner. Hunch stood for a moment without support, swaying, then sprang on Bruce and threw him against the closed gangway, where he lay clutching at the cabin roof.

"You—you—" Hunch was for once too angry to swear. "Get below there!" he said finally, after he had steadied the schooner on her course. "Get below, quick!"

Bruce without looking around fumbled with the companion slide, and ducking down between two waves, pulled it shut after him. After he had disappeared, and the schooner was running more easily on the long northwest tack that was to take her to the Liddington harbor, Hunch slowly got his bearings, and for a long time he stood pouring out a flood of

HIS LITTLE WORLD

profanity. This outburst came too late for Bruce's ears, but not too late to act as a safety-valve to Hunch's temper. Then he took a drink.

He stood at the wheel all day and all night. At noon and at dusk he sent Billy below to get up a rough meal, which he ate with one hand, washing it down with the whiskey. At about nine o'clock, he called Billy back, and told him to turn in. And when the dawn broke, and the bleak sand hills of Michigan stretched out on the horizon, he was still at the wheel, but his eyes were dimmer and his knees were weaker. Hunch was drunk. He was quiet for the time, and he handled the schooner as she had never been handled before, but the fact remained. Bruce had not appeared at all. He was curled up in his bunk, waiting for the end, when the madman at the wheel should reach the sleepy stage.

HUNCH'S WEDDING

Once or twice in the night, when the schooner was careering through some especially hard blow, Bruce cried a little, like a girl, at the thought of the wedding that might not be. He did not know that at this time it was the thought of two blue eyes smiling at him, and of two lips pressed to his cheek, that raised Hunch above the grasp of the whiskey.

The morning had gone before they were within reach of the Liddington harbor. They passed the breakwaters three times at noon and after, each time a mile nearer than before. The wind had swung around during the night closer to the south. Hunch was beating in from the northeast, evidently planning to get close enough to run in during a lull. The box of a lighthouse on the south breakwater grew larger. After a time, Billy, who was forward, could see three white figures on the other breakwater, waving

HIS LITTLE WORLD

their arms. He knew that they were members of the life-saving crew, warning them not to make the attempt.

Hunch took a look about the boat and up through the rigging. The schooner was badly wrenched and strained, but was apparently good for another effort. He looked over the long reach of breakers, sweeping up on a slant from the south. He took a drink and called to Billy.

"Come back here! Tell *him* to come up on deck." His manner was heavy and surly.

Bruce came up with a white face and rings under his eyes.

"Sit down there," growled Hunch, pointing to the low roof of the cabin. "You too," to Billy.

When they were seated facing him, holding on to each other and to the gangway slide, Hunch said: "D' y' know

HUNCH'S WEDDING

where you're goin'? You're goin' to my weddin'. Bruce, he gets er girl, I get's er weddin'—un'erstan'? Sit up straight there—like er gen'leman. You think we're goin' to er weddin'? Mebbe we ain't. Mebbe we're goin' to hell. Why don't you laugh? This 's our weddin' day."

His mood suddenly changed and he paid no attention to them, giving all his energy to the handling of the schooner. Then he motioned to Billy to go forward. For a long time there was silence, excepting that Hunch occasionally muttered, "We'll get back. I tol' her we'd get back." Bruce sat terrified on the cabin, facing the stern, not seeing where the schooner was going. After a while he could stand it no longer. He looked over his shoulder. They were close to the breakwaters now, and a little to the south. The three life-saving men were running back along the break-

HIS LITTLE WORLD

water, evidently in order to be ready at the station if the schooner should miss the channel. Then he heard Hunch say, "Turn round there!" Hunch had his revolver out and was pointing it at him with a grin. Bruce sat still, for Hunch was careless when he was drunk. Hunch kept it in his hand, and looked at Bruce from time to time with a cunning expression.

The schooner came bounding up from the south, running nearly before the wind. Hunch knew what to allow for wind, waves, and currents. Suddenly he shouted to Billy and jammed the wheel over hard. With Billy at the sheets, the bow came slowly about and headed direct for the lighthouse. Billy quaked. But as she ploughed forward she fell off to the leeward under the sweep of the waves, and slipped neatly between the breakwaters and into the more quiet water of the

HUNCH'S WEDDING

channel. The lee rail scraped a little, but nothing was started.

Bruce sat motionless on the cabin with a face like a sheet. But Hunch waved his revolver jovially at the life-savers on the dock, and all the while they were creeping up the channel he sang profane songs at the top of his voice, pausing now and then for a drink. When they were fast to the dock, he floundered ashore and stood laughing at Billy, who was still clinging to the weather-stays. Bruce stepped up to him.

"Say, Hunch, don't you think you'd better quit drinking? The wedding's tonight, you know."

"What right you got talkin' to me 'bout—"

"You're coming to the wedding, Hunch, ain't you?"

"I ain't goin' to no wedding. Get out o' here! Go on now."

HIS LITTLE WORLD

Bruce walked steadily and rapidly up the deck, and disappeared around the corner of a lumber-shed.

A few hours later Hunch came plunging out of a saloon, with two men who were afraid to decline his treats. It was dark, but when a certain carriage passed, he could see by the corner light that one of the occupants wore a white veil. So he went back into the saloon, and amused himself shooting patterns through the stove until he fell asleep over a box of sawdust. Then it was, and not before, that the discreet constable had him carted away to sober up at the county's expense.

CHAPTER V

MAMIE'S DEVICE

CONSIDINE was married in May. For four months Badeau heard of him and Mamie only in a round-about way. One day, toward the close of September, the two men met on the road.

"Hello, Hunch," said Bruce, "how are you?"

"All right. How's yourself?"

"Fine. Why ain't you been round to see us. We're keeping house."

"I dunno. Ain't had much time."

"How're you getting along, anyhow, Hunch? How's the old *Dean*?"

"First-class."

"Well, say, come up and see us. Come

HIS LITTLE WORLD

to-night. Mamie was asking about you the other day."

Badeau spent a long evening at Bruce's cottage, and had a good time. A week later he went again. Through the autumn, as the weather grew heavy, and lake trips became more uncertain, he took to spending the evening with them as often as he could. Mamie was prettier than ever, with a new depth in her eyes, and Bruce appeared very well as the head of a household. They played cards a good deal, and talked about old times. After a while Hunch found it easy to drop in and take supper with them.

One evening late in October, when he came in to supper, he missed the usual cordiality. Mamie's eyes were red and Bruce's manner was strained. He left early and Bruce walked out with him, saying that a little walk would do him good.

MAMIE'S DEVICE

"Say, Hunch," he said, when they reached the sidewalk, "I don't know whether you heard about it, but—"

"About what?"

"Well, it ain't any of my feelings, Hunch, but you can't help people talking. You see, there's some folks that don't understand things, and they're talking a little, you know, about your being around to the house so much—"

They walked on, both silent.

"Of course, Hunch, it ain't what I think, you see that."

Again he waited for a reply.

"I'll tell you, Hunch, Mame and I've been talking it over. She's a good friend of yours, and she says if you stop coming, just because people talk, she'll never forgive you. She's right, too. And we was thinking, mebbe we'd have one of the girls around. Say, ain't there nobody you like pretty well, Hunch?

HIS LITTLE WORLD

There's Jess Bartlett, now. She's an awful nice girl. And she's stuck on you, Hunch. She's Jim Bartlett's sister, you know. He's on the life-saving crew. Mame's been talking with her, and she says she'll come around with you tomorrow night, if you'll go get her. Will you?"

Hunch wanted to say no, but he looked around at Bruce, and some of his anger left him when he saw how eager and friendly was Bruce's face. So he replied: "Guess so."

Hunch spent a sleepless night, and arose with the determination never to go to Bruce's again. He continued to decide the question all day from different points of view. In the evening, however, a little earlier than he was expected, he called at Jess Bartlett's house.

Jess Bartlett was an attractive girl, full of health and spirits. She admired

MAMIE'S DEVICE

Hunch's bigness and strength, and made such an effort to be agreeable that before they had finished the long walk to Bruce's house, they felt pretty well acquainted. The evening that followed was different from those that Hunch had been spending at Bruce's. There was more gaiety and brightness. Jess knew that she was in a sense on parade, and, as Mamie confided to Hunch, she "kept things stirred up." They played some games that Jess explained to them, and then Mamie made molasses candy, and an impromptu candy-pull took place in the kitchen. Once Jess slipped Hunch's scarfpin from his tie, and Bruce and Mamie laughed knowingly at Hunch's clumsy efforts to take it away from her. Finally she fled into the corner and held the pin behind her with both hands. He hesitated before her and Bruce called, "Oh, Hunch, you're slow," whereupon

HIS LITTLE WORLD

Mamie blushed and laughed, and Jess blushed and tossed her head. So Hunch put both arms around her, but she struggled for some time before he got the pin away from her. Then she dropped into a chair, flushed and excited, her hair—a rich auburn—tumbling about her face; and Mamie whispered to Hunch, “Ain’t she pretty, though?”

The night was dark, and on the way home Jess slipped her hand through his arm. Now, that they were away from the others, Hunch was embarrassed.

“I never knew you were like this,” she said.

“How do you mean?”

“Why, I don’t know. I’ve always heard that you didn’t like girls; that you were—you know—kind of horrid.”

“I haven’t liked very many girls.”

“I’ll tell you something, if you won’t

MAMIE'S DEVICE

tell. You won't think it's funny, will you?"

"Sure not."

"Well, I used to be afraid of you."

"Ain't you now?"

"No—that is, not very much."

"What makes you afraid of me?"

"Oh, I don't know." She danced a few steps before him on the walk. "Come on, don't be so pokey. Can you dance?"

"No, not very much."

"Oh, you've got to learn to dance, or I won't like you a bit. I'll tell you, I'll teach you, some of the nights when we don't go over to Mame's. That'll be fun—don't you think?"

Hunch nodded, and caught her arm as she whirled by him, and they walked home soberly, talking about Bruce and Mamie and how happy they seemed to be. At the door Hunch said "good-

HIS LITTLE WORLD

night," and started away. She stood on the steps.

"Say," she called softly, as he opened the gate, "you've got the key."

Hunch came back, a little confused, and took her key from his pocket. He tried to unlock the door, and they both laughed when he got the key stuck in the lock.

"You're awful clumsy," she said, and in trying to help him her hand rested for a moment on his.

"My, your hands are cold," she said.

He took hold of her hand and replied, "Mine ain't so cold as yours."

"Yes, it is." She drew hers away slowly, and opened the door. They both laughed. Jess leaned back against the door.

"Say," she said, "when are you coming around again?"

"I dunno. When do you think?"

MAMIE'S DEVICE

"Mame asked me if you were coming there to-morrow night."

"What'd you tell her?"

"Do you want to?"

"Yes, if you do."

"All right, I'll be ready."

In a week it was generally known that Hunch Badeau was "going with Jess Bartlett." Bruce and Mamie poked fun at them, and looked mischievous whenever they were mentioned. Mamie used to enjoy having them at the house, and would sit at one side and laugh quietly all the evening at Hunch's awkward ways and Jess's blushes and shy glances. Sometimes, if they were left together in the living room, Bruce would make a great noise outside the door before he came in, and would pretend not to see their conscious glances, talking loudly all the while as if to cover their embarrassment. And as Jess really liked Hunch

HIS LITTLE WORLD

and Hunch was drifting blindly with the current, all these doings magnified their common interest, and gradually made it easier for them to be alone together, and to talk about themselves and their likings and hopes. Hunch grew more careful about his appearance, and spent less time than formerly with the wharf men and the elevator gang.

One evening, about the middle of November, Hunch went around to the Bartlett's as usual. Jess was a little embarrassed about something. When Hunch said, "Shall we go down to Bruce's?" she hesitated.

"Guess we hadn't better," she said.
"Mame isn't very well."

"All right. What'll we do?"

"I don't care. Do you want to stay here? There's nobody home to-night. I'll tell you, you can have a dancing lesson."

MAMIE'S DEVICE

"Guess I won't be much good at it. I don't believe I can learn."

"Oh, yes, you can. You'll do beautifully. Now stand up."

Hunch felt awkward as she showed him the steps, and then tried to guide him about the room.

"I'm an awful fool," he said.

"You ain't either. Here, you guide me."

Hunch hesitated and looked at her.

"Take hold of my hand. Put your arm around—oh, pshaw! it's just dancing; don't be so stupid. Not way off there. Hold me closer or we can't dance at all. Oh, you don't understand."

Hunch gripped her doggedly. She was leaning a little, trying to watch his feet, and as they stood there, her hair brushing against her shoulder and a slight blush on her forehead, he felt that he was losing his self-control. Then he

HIS LITTLE WORLD

found that he did not care, and he made no effort to hold himself in check.

"Now, one, two, three—one, two, three.—Not that way. Try it again. One, two, three—you don't get it, somehow."

Hunch was standing still, holding her firmly. She was so small in his grasp, he felt so strong and he could so easily lift her from the floor with his one arm that he was almost tempted to try it. She was looking down, and he could see the tip of an ear and a flushed cheek below the tangle of hair. Then for a moment she went on rapidly with her instructions, but her voice faltered, and stopped. They stood for a time without moving, then Hunch drew her a little closer and grasped her hand more firmly. She frowned and looked up, but she could not hide the color on her face, and the smiling strength in Hunch's eyes overbore the half-hearted disapproval in hers.

MAMIE'S DEVICE

Hunch, with his other arm, drew her head against his shoulder. He was happy in a way that he had never before understood, for she trusted him, and he was strong and would protect her.

CHAPTER VI

BRUCE CELEBRATES

MAMIE was sick. Hunch did not go to the house, but one night after supper, while he was changing his clothes to go to the Bartlett's, Bruce came in.

"Hello, Bruce. Sit down."

"Can't stop but a minute. Where're you going?"

"Up to see Jess."

"I ain't seen you to shake on that, have I, Hunch. Mame told me. She says Jess's tickled to death. When're you going to be married?"

"Dunno exactly. Guess not before spring."

"Did you hear about Mame, Hunch?"

"Sick, you mean?"

BRUCE CELEBRATES

"Yes, I s'posed you knew what was the matter. Thought mebbe Jess told you—but she couldn't though, could she? I'm awful worried. It's too soon, you know. You see that's what I come to see you about. I've been shaving it pretty close. Had to be up nights and it kind of knocked my work. And the doctor's sticking me like everything. I didn't know but—well, I'll tell you, Hunch—can you let me have fifty for a couple of weeks? I don't get my salary till the end of the month, and I've got to settle some things right away."

"Sure," said Hunch. "I've got a little put by."

"I'm awful sorry, Hunch, but you see how it is—"

"That's all right, Bruce. Any time'll do."

"I'll give you my note. That's about all I can do."

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"Not much you won't. You just take it, and pay when you can, and don't you say nothing about it."

For a few days there was gloom at Bruce's cottage. Once Hunch went around and was met at the door by Bruce, who looked worn. Hunch did not know how to ask about Mamie, but Bruce came out and drew the door to behind him.

"She's pretty bad, Hunch. I don't know what I'll do if anything happens. The doctor says we'll know one way or the other in a day or so."

Hunch gripped his hand and went away.

That evening, when Hunch went around to see Jess, he was depressed. The thought of Mamie's suffering stood in his way whenever he tried to respond to Jess's sallies. As the evening went on, Hunch's mood grew worse. Jess went into a sulk later; when he dropped a care-

BRUCE CELEBRATES

less remark that hurt her pride, she grew angry.

"What's the matter, Jess?" Hunch said at last.

"I guess you know."

"I don't believe you want me here."

"Oh, you can go if you want to."

Hunch looked at her, vaguely conscious that he had been unkind; but he went away without kissing her good-night.

One morning, a day or two later, he was dressing, when Bruce came in, with disordered hair and excited eyes.

"It's all right, Hunch; it's all right! Doctor says it's wonderful how she come through it."

Hunch sat on the bed without speaking, but with an almost painful expression of relief on his face.

"It's a girl," said Bruce, and he laughed. "Come on over, Hunch. It's a fine little kid. Come along with me."

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"No," said Hunch, slowly. "I don't believe I can just now."

"What's the matter? Why can't you come?"

"I've got a lot of work to do to-day."

"Don't talk to me about working. You're my best friend and I want you to come first."

"No, I can't, Bruce."

"You make me tired, Hunch. You might as well be decent about it."

"There ain't no use of getting mad, Bruce. I'll get around before long."

"That's what I call——"

"No, you don't, now, Bruce. You'd better go on back. I guess they need you anyhow."

Bruce muttered as he went out. He did not know why Hunch refused to go, and Hunch was not sure that he knew himself.

All day Hunch alternated between a

BRUCE CELEBRATES

nervous buoyancy and a sense of depression. After supper he went to Bartlett's. Jess was watching at the window, and she hurried to open the door. He was wondering what to say, to show her that he was sorry for his unkindness, when she closed the door and flung her arms around his neck, and for a long time she cried on his shoulder. This was the end of their quarrel.

Finally, when they were in the parlor, Jess said, with lowered eyes: "Have you been down to Mame's, John?"

"No." Hunch was embarrassed.

"I—I went over this afternoon."

After a silence she went on. "Seems awful funny, don't it?"

Hunch nodded.

"She wants us to come down tonight. I didn't know whether you'd want to."

"Sure."

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"She's awful proud about it. I—I can't get over thinking about it—about her and him. It's awfully little."

They walked to Bruce's and sat for an hour in the living room. Mamie was too sick to see them, but Bruce opened the door into her room so that she could hear their voices. Bruce was bubbling over with happiness. When he finally brought out the baby, a sickly little thing, he was laughing out loud. Jess took it in her arms.

"My, ain't it light," she said.

"Six pounds," said Bruce.

"What's her name going to be?"

"Dunno yet. Mame wants to name it after her mother."

"John," said Jess, "take her just a minute. She's such a funny little thing."

Hunch moved away and shook his head. This made Bruce and Jess laugh.

For the rest of the evening Hunch was

BRUCE CELEBRATES

thoughtful. His manner subdued Jess, and they walked home with little to say.

The following night, as Hunch was coming away from Bartlett's, he met Jess's brother on the street.

"Hello, Hunch," said Jim. "Say, if you want to see a circus, you ought to go down to Herve's place."

"Why, what's up?"

"Bruce Considine's celebrating."

"What—drinking?"

"Yes, he's got a peach of a jag already."

Hunch hurried down to the saloon. Bruce was sitting on one of the tables, treating the crowd.

"Hello, Hunch," he said, waving his glass. "Have somethin' on me, ol' man. All my fren's got to have somethin' on me to-night. I'm a father, Hunch."

Hunch took his arm and jerked him

HIS LITTLE WORLD

to his feet. Bruce leaned against Hunch, and a man laughed.

"Shut up, there!" said Hunch. Then he led Bruce away and took him to his own room. He needed to think. It was not such a simple matter as in the other days, when Bruce was one of his crew. He sat by the bed until the night was half gone. Bruce had gone to sleep. Hunch had been angry, but after awhile he began to think of Mamie and the baby, and his expression softened a little. Mamie was not in condition to bear a shock. The only thing to do was to sober Bruce and get him home, so he took off his coat and hammered him until he showed signs of consciousness. Finally he got him aroused, and then ducked his head in the washbowl, and scrubbed his face with soap and water.

It was two o'clock in the morning before Bruce was fit to go home. Then

BRUCE CELEBRATES

he sat on the bed and looked helplessly at Hunch.

"What'll I do, Hunch? I can't go home now."

"You shut up and go along. Don't do any more talking about it."

"I can't, Hunch. Think of it! There ain't a thing I can tell Mame. I went uptown to get some medicine and said I'd come right back."

"You'll go back all the same, if I have to take you myself."

"What can I tell her?"

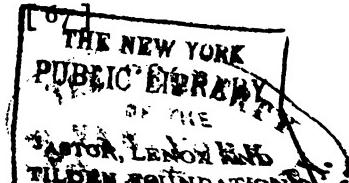
Hunch walked up and down the floor.

"That's your business, Bruce. It ain't mine."

"Don't throw me up now, Hunch. Oh—everything's going to smash. What'll I do!"

"What do you want to do, lie to her?"

"It ain't that, Hunch; it ain't lying.



HIS LITTLE WORLD

I can't tell her how it was. It would kill her."

"All right, if you want to lie to her, you tell her I was drunk and you brought me home. Now get out—go home, go somewhere, but get out of here."

"I—I—don't you see, Hunch—"

"Go on now!"

Bruce went out talking to himself.

CHAPTER VII

A LIGHT GOES OUT

MAMIE grew slowly better, but the baby was kept alive only by constant attention. Hunch did not go to the house at all. Jess suggested it once or twice, but it made Hunch look so black that she began to avoid the subject. For the rest of the time Hunch was in better spirits than usual. After the night with Bruce, he had made up his mind to drop Bruce and his family from his mind. He had no right to interfere in Bruce's domestic matters. The decision brought relief, and Jess and he were happier than at any time since the beginning of their engagement. They spent their evenings going to entertain-

HIS LITTLE WORLD

ments, or sitting in the parlor, talking, with the lamp turned low.

One night Hunch came in a little earlier than usual, without knocking, and found Jess bending over a paper with some sort of colored illustrations. She slipped it into a drawer as he entered the room.

“What you reading?” he asked.

“Oh, nothing.”

“Yes, you was. I saw it.” He laughed and started to open the drawer, but she stood against it.

“Please don’t look.”

“Don’t you tell me all your secrets?”

“Oh, well, look if you want to.”

“I don’t, unless you want me to, Jess.”

She opened the drawer and drew out the paper. It was illustrated with plans. What’s the matter with this?” he asked. “What you afraid of?”

A LIGHT GOES OUT

"Nothing. Sometimes I think it's kind of fun to pick out the houses I'd like—just for fun, you know."

"Which one do you like?"

"Oh, I don't know. I was just thinking that maybe some day we'd—" She stopped and turned away. Hunch thought she was joking, and he took her shoulders and gently turned her around. She was crying.

"Why—what's the matter, Jess?"

She buried her face on his coat. Hunch could not follow her sudden changes. Now he looked down at her hair, puzzled, waiting for her to explain. Finally he said, "You've got to tell me what's the matter, Jess."

"I was only thinking—one of the girls said—said you didn't love me, John—she said—" Hunch tried to break in, but she went on, "you weren't going to—that we'd never get married. And

HIS LITTLE WORLD

you—you never said anything about getting married, John.” Hunch looked over her head at the wall. He could not tell her that he had not allowed himself to think about it, that he had been drifting steadily further from the thought of it. “And I thought maybe you’d speak about it, and we’d talk about a house—and I wanted that—that one on the front page with the shingles on the front. It’s a beautiful house, John.”

Hunch stood silent for a long time.

“Why don’t you say something? Oh, John, it isn’t true, is it? You do love me, John?”

“No,” said Hunch, “it ain’t true. We’ll be married just as soon as you’re ready, Jess.”

She did not look up for a long time. When she did, her eyes were still wet.

“Don’t you think it would be kind of fun, John, to talk about the house?”

A LIGHT GOES OUT

They went over the plans, sitting on the sofa by the front window, and talked out every detail. Hunch agreed with nearly all of Jess's suggestions, even to the grate in the front room, an expensive feature.

When they were out in the entry, and Hunch was putting on his ulster, Jess stood before him with her back against the door.

"Say, do you want me to tell you something?"

"Course."

"Oh, I—don't you laugh, John, it ain't funny. It's mean. It's what somebody said. She said if a man really loves a girl, he gives her something—so folks'll know—like a ring or something." She laughed nervously. "And I just told her that I wasn't engaged on her account, and if she thought I ought to wear a ring she needn't look at me, that's all. She was awful mad."

HIS LITTLE WORLD

Hunch was silent.

"Now, don't you be cross. I don't want a ring, John, anyway, until—well, until we're married. It don't mean anything when two people love each other like you and me do. Good-night, you old boy. Now, don't go and be cross. And don't forget we're going to the dance to-morrow night."

Hunch laughed a little and kissed her. Then he walked slowly down the street.

At noon on the following day, He went into the jewelry store near the post-office and looked at rings. There was one large ring with two diamonds set in a snake's head.

"How much is it?" Hunch asked.

"Ninety dollars. Best ring we've got. There ain't another like it this side of Grand Rapids."

"That's the one I want then," said Hunch. "Will you put it by for me?"

A LIGHT GOES OUT

"Take it right along, Mr. Badeau. There's no hurry about the money."

"No," said Hunch, "I won't take it until I can pay for it."

"All right, Mr. Badeau, we'll set it aside for you."

By a second loan Hunch had let Bruce have nearly all his ready money, so that he lacked a large part of the ninety dollars, but he was determined to have the ring within a week or two. He was walking slowly down the street when he met Jim Bartlett.

"Hello, Hunch."

"Hello, Jim."

"Say, come into Herve's a minute. I want to see you."

When they were seated at one of the round tables, Jim said, "I s'pose it ain't none of my business, Hunch; but when you've known a fellow all your life, you can't help being kind of interested. I

HIS LITTLE WORLD

knew you was sort of looking after Bruce Considine once in awhile. I know he used to work for you, and it seemed to me lately that he's getting a little off the track."

"What's the matter? What's Bruce done?"

"Well, I hear about it from two or three places. You know Billy Riggs's folks live next door to Bruce, and this morning Billy came up to the lookout while I was on the watch, and told me a little about it. Billy's always known Mame Banks, you know. I think he used to be kind of stuck on her."

"What about it?"

"Billy says Bruce is drinking right along—not jagged, you know, but kind of ugly. And he says, his little sister says, she saw him hit Mame last night—'t weren't none of her business, of course. She heard 'em talking and was looking

A LIGHT GOES OUT

through the window. Going on down the street?"

"No," said Hunch, after a silence, "I'll sit here awhile."

"All right. So long, Hunch."

Hunch did not work at all that afternoon. He went to the wharf and watched the men at work on the foundation of the new grain elevator. Once he started back uptown, thinking that he might find Bruce at Herve's saloon. He got as far as the planing mill, and stopped, wondering what he could say to Bruce if he should meet him. Then he went back to the wharf. After supper he walked rapidly out to the eastern limits of the town, where the pavement ends and the yellow sand begins. He had forgotten about Jess and the dance. He went back to Herve's and looked in at the door. Bruce was sitting at one of the rear tables playing poker with some

HIS LITTLE WORLD

of the elevator men. Hunch stepped back and stood outside on the corner. For the first time since he had known Bruce he felt like leaving him to go to the bad. He wanted to do something himself that would make Mamie's life easier.

He suddenly turned and walked out to Bruce's house. He was excited when he knocked on the door. He heard some one say, "Come in;" then he was inside the door with his hat in his hands. Mamie was sitting by the cradle rocking it with her foot.

"How d'ye do, Mis' Considine. Is—Bruce home?"

"No, he's gone to the doctor's. Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks, I dunno. Bruce, he ain't been very well lately, has he?"

"Why, yes."

"I heard he wasn't. I been kind of worried about him. Say, it ain't none

A LIGHT GOES OUT

of my business, but he was my man for a good while, and if he ain't doing the right thing by you, why, I want to know it, and I'll learn him he can't cut no monkey shines—”

Mamie had stopped rocking and was looking at him.

“Mebbe I ain't got much to say about him now—I dunno's I have anything to say, but—there's some things a man can't do, and—”

“What do you mean?”

“I dunno just what I mean—I know Bruce, and I've heard that he ain't doing the square thing.”

“I don't understand.”

“I hear he's hit you, and I just wanted you to know I ain't been your friend and his friend for nothing—” Hunch was talking fast and wildly, “and he's got to answer to me if he's doing anything like that.”

HIS LITTLE WORLD

Mamie was on her feet now. Her eyes were flashing.

"Is this the way you talk about your friends? And a man who's been as kind to you as Bruce has?"

"Bruce—?"

"Why don't you come when he's here? Why don't you wait and talk to him?"

Hunch sat still, looking at her. He had nothing to say.

"Why don't you go away? What makes you talk like this? Don't you understand that he's my husband?"

Hunch moved toward the door.

"Yes," he said, "he's your husband." The meaning of that word seemed to be coming slowly into his mind.

"I'll tell you," he said, with one hand on the door-knob, "I guess I made a mistake. I—"

"Yes, you have made a mistake." She followed him toward the door. "Bruce

A LIGHT GOES OUT

has never said anything mean about you. But I know where he was the other night when he took care of you. And he wouldn't have told me if I hadn't almost made him. And now you—”

They stood at the door looking into each other's eyes—hers flashing, his stupid. A choking sound came from the cradle. Mamie stepped softly across the room and set the cradle rocking gently. Then she bent over it, patting the little blanket and whispering. Hunch stood watching her. She pressed her cheek to the face on the pillow, then suddenly stood up. Her face grew white. She looked at Hunch, and he tiptoed across the room and bent over the cradle. The baby's face was white. He touched the face with his finger. It was cold.

Mamie sank into a chair. She was still looking at him. He said awkwardly, “I'll get Bruce.”

HIS LITTLE WORLD

His hat had dropped to the floor and he picked it up and tiptoed back to the door. He opened it and turned. Mamie had thrown herself across the cradle, and he went out without speaking.

He found Bruce in Herve's saloon and sent him home.

CHAPTER VIII

SETTING A DAY

HUNCH took charge of the funeral. After it was over, and while the man was closing the casket, he stepped to the front porch for a breath of air. Jess Bartlett had lingered after the service, and now stood alone on the steps. Hunch hesitated in the doorway. He had not thought of Jess during the last few days, and now he did not know what to say. But she was determined that he should speak first, so after an embarrassing silence he said, "Hello, Jess."

She turned away.

"Ain't you going to speak to me, Jess."

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"I don't see as I ought to speak to you."

Hunch looked at her helplessly, and when, after a minute, she turned and saw his expression, she partly relented.

"When are you coming to see me again?"

"You know why I ain't been 'round, Jess."

"I waited for you the other night. You said you were coming."

"I know it, Jess. I'm sorry. Can't I come to-night?"

"I s'pose you can if you want to."

They could not say any more, for it was time to start the carriages. But early in the evening Hunch went to her house, and they walked to the lake? They found it hard to talk. Hunch finally blurted out, "I'm going to get the ring next week. It's a pretty one, I think."

SETTING A DAY

He felt her arm tremble, but she said nothing.

"I guess you're mad at me, ain't you?"

"No, I ain't mad."

"Why don't you say something, Jess?"

She came closer to him as they walked.

"John, I wish—I wish we could get married. Somehow I don't feel as if you belonged to me. I know it's silly, but I can't help it."

"How soon can you get ready?"

"I—I wasn't thinking of it just that way—I—"

"Is next month too soon?"

She looked up at him and laughed softly. Their eyes met and they understood each other better. They walked down the beach and looked out over the flat lake.

"I'm afraid we'll have to live kind of simple for a while," Hunch said. "I ain't very rich, you know."

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"Do you think I care about that, John? Don't you know I love you because you're so strong and good, and you can do so much. Everybody knows you're going to be rich some day. Jim, he says there ain't another man in town that's got as much sand as you have, John."

So they talked all through the long evening, telling each other their thoughts and plans and hopes; and her trust in him gave Hunch a sense of strength and responsibility. When he left her, very late, at the front steps, he had thought of a plan which he kept for the time to himself.

CHAPTER IX

THE STORM

IN the morning, directly after breakfast, Hunch went to see the foreman of the elevator gang.

"Where're you getting your timber, Murphy?" he asked.

"Getting most of it up at Manistee."

"Got it in yet?"

"More'n half of it. The rest of it's a late order."

"How much is there to come?"

"About fifty thousand."

"How's it delivered?"

"F. O. B. on the dock here. Why, you looking for a job?"

"Yes, wouldn't mind. I could get it down here cheaper'n the railroad, and pretty near as quick."

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"Navigation's closed, though. I don't know as the Manistee folks 'd want to risk it."

"Yes, but look at that." Hunch motioned toward the lake, which lay blue and sparkling beyond the Buttersville sandspit. "Quiet as August and it's a short run. There ain't hardly any ice either."

"Well, you might talk to 'em up at Manistee, Hunch. Of course, they can deliver anyhow they like, but I can't run chances of delay."

So Hunch went over to the telegraph office in the railroad station, and after a great deal of writing and rewriting made up the following message:

To Wm. F. JACKSON, Esq.,
Pres't Manistee Timber Co.:

Will deliver the Liddington elevator bill of fifty thousand feet by Lake, One Hundred Dollars. If terms satisfactory, wire reply, so I can deliver while weather holds fair.

J. BADEAU.

THE STORM

When this message reached Jackson, he was sitting at his desk, with the railroad rate figured out on a sheet of paper before him. He promptly laid the two offers side by side and looked from one to the other. There was no doubt that the lake route would be cheaper. But, on the other hand, it was now after the first of December, and navigation was nominally closed on the great lakes. Insurance he could get, if at all, only at a prohibitive rate.

It was a question of judgment, and before deciding it, Mr. Jackson got up and walked over to the window. The busy little city of Manistee shut off his view of Lake Michigan, but he knew it was flat as a mirror. Not many hours earlier he had stood by another window, in his big house on the bluff, and as he shaved he had looked out over miles and miles of blue water, as calm as in June. It

HIS LITTLE WORLD

was warm enough for mid-autumn; the barometer promised continued clear weather. Altogether, Badeau's offer had decidedly the best of it. So he sent a message to "J. Badeau, Liddington," asking him to bring up his schooner at once.

Hunch, on receiving the message, went up to Herve's saloon, and while standing at the bar, let his eyes rove about the room until they settled on a lank, middle-aged man in the corner.

"Hello, Herm Peabody."

"Hello, Hunch."

"What you doing in these parts?"

"Come up to see my niece—Joe Cartier's wife."

"Busy nowadays?"

"No, ain't picked up anything for the winter yet."

"What would you think of taking a trip with me?"

"The *Dean*?"

THE STORM

"Yes."

"A little late for schooners, ain't it?"

"Not in this weather, no. It's only a little trip—up to Manistee."

"Well, this ain't been a very flush season, Hunch, and I s'pose I ought to take it."

"Can you come right along? I'd like to overhaul her a little and run up there this afternoon. If they're reasonable quick about loading, we can get right back."

A few hours later Hunch ran her out between the piers, with Peabody up forward, and pointed north-east-by-north to clear Big Point Sable. The breeze was light, and it was not until six o'clock that evening that the *Dean* ran into the harbor at Manistee. Hunch promptly looked up the lumberman.

"How are you, Badeau. You came right up."

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"Yes, I did."

"We'll put that timber aboard the first thing in the morning."

"You can't do it to-night, then?"

"Oh, hardly." Mr. Jackson glanced out at the starlit sky. "You don't think there's any doubt about the weather, do you?"

"Maybe not. But if I could get it aboard now, I'd start right back. We know we're all right to-night."

The lumberman's supper awaited him; his men had scattered to their homes. He glanced again at the sky, then said, "The morning'll do, I guess."

"Well, it's just this way, Mr. Jackson. I made you the offer to take this load down, but I don't feel like running any more risk than I have to."

"If you see anything to worry you in that sky, Badeau, you can just let us run the risk."

THE STORM

The thermometer dropped twenty-five degrees during the night. A film of ice formed in the harbor. The wind swung around to the northeast, and brought a bank of innocent looking clouds that spread slowly over the sky. Out on the lake front the shore ice grew higher and whiter as the waves beat tirelessly over it, and formed blocks and cones and miniature mountain ranges.

When Jackson met Hunch on the wharf, he seemed to have forgotten what he had said the evening before. "Well, Badeau, what do you make of it?"

"Of what?"

"The weather. Think you can make it?"

"Yes, I think so."

"You ought to have gone out last night."

To this Hunch made no reply; he kept one eye on the work of the timber shovers.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"Still," added Jackson, "you can run down in two or three hours with this wind."

A little later Hunch joined Peabody by the wheel. "Do you know of a good man here, Herm?"

"For the schooner, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Why—I'll see if I can pick up Duke Buckingham."

"Go ahead. Tell him we're short-handed."

When the *Dean* finally fell away from the wharf, in tow of Jackson's tug, it was well on toward noon. And none of the three men on board was over-cheerful when he looked out at the lake and felt the keen wind of the open water. Even on shore it was a day for heavy jackets and gloves; out here it was bitter cold.

"Set the tops'l's, Herm," said Badeau, from the wheel.

THE STORM

Peabody looked at Buckingham, and then, without a word, the two men set to work.

They ran nearly before the wind, that is, nearly southwest. Badeau kept her up a few points to the westward in order to avoid the surf-currents that bore down on Point Sable. The deck was piled so high with timber that the schooner was unwieldy; her scuppers were nearly awash, and the stern was down so low in the water that half the time the small boat, hanging from the after davits, was afloat. When all sail was spread, Hunch called his men aft and gave them a hand in hauling the boat aboard and forward.

Rapidly the piers and the bluffs of Manistee fell off astern. Steadily the sky thickened, and fine, hard flakes of snow began to blow about their ears. Badeau alone did not mind the cold; his coat was open, his hands bare.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"What do you think o' this business, Herm?" asked Buckingham.

"Oh—well, it ain't but three hours in this wind."

"I don't like them tops'l's."

Peabody had no reply to this.

"What the devil's he runnin' way out here for?"

Peabody turned toward Point Sable; and then they both looked in silence. They could see the white line of the surf, due south. On the bluff the trees were tossing and bending.

Buckingham was the first to turn away. "Look there!" he exclaimed, gripping Peabody's arm. "Hi there, Hunch!" A black squall was sweeping down from the north, as sharply defined on the water as if laid out with a rule. Before the line were the leaden billows, behind it a black, wrinkled surface, dotted with whitecaps. "Hi there, Hunch!"

THE STORM

But Hunch's eyes had been long trained to take in a full circle at a glance. "Ready about!" he was bellowing, "Ready about!"

The wheel spun around, the jibs flapped, the schooner reeled as she swung lazily up. The three men watched the squall. Slowly—slowly—creaking angrily—Will she make it?—No—Yes—No—"Struck, by——! Hold fast, boys! *Hold fast!*"

Over she went, till the booms dipped and the waters of Lake Michigan ran from stem to stern along the rail. Hunch left the wheel and sprang forward for the main sheet. Before he had it in his hand he was drenched through. Cursing like a Northern Peninsula lumberman, he hauled away. Peabody and Buckingham were together at the foresheet, with white faces and blue lips. Over again! They got up to the weather-rail—it

HIS LITTLE WORLD

was like climbing a gable roof—and still hauled away. For thirty endless seconds they fought, then her bowsprit, scooping deep into every wave, swung around and pointed into the wind. Hunch, shaking the water from his eyes, looked up and about; both topsails were gone, and a thousand feet or so of timber.

They could breathe now. But only for a moment, for the storm was beating them back toward the point. Another battle, and mainsail and foresail were double reefed and the *Dean* was slowly working up into the wind. There was no thought now of rounding the point; it was a question of getting sea room. Once Badeau thought of anchoring, but his judgment warned him not to try. One fact was encouraging, they made a little headway. By three o'clock in the afternoon they were back off the Manistee piers, and three miles out.

THE STORM

"What's that comin' down the harbor," shouted Buckingham, "a tug?"

"Looks like it. Yes, that's what it is."

"See there, she's whistlin'." They could see the steam, though no sound reached them.

"She can't make it—hold fast, there!" The *Dean* nosed deep into a curling wave, struggled to rise, plunged on through, and the wave rushed over them. When they could see again, a few more thousand feet of lumber had disappeared.

"That was a soaker. Hunch all right, Herm?"

"Sure. See, she's putting back. Looks like the *Cecilia Smith*."

"That's what she is. I never did think much o' Bill Peters."

"Maybe he's right. He couldn't ever tow us in through that surf—say, the boat's gone!"

HIS LITTLE WORLD

“The — it is!”

“Look for yourself.”

“Lord, you’re right! Kind o’ rough on Hunch. He’ll be lucky to come through this without losin’ a wad. There’s sixty or eighty dollars worth o’ timber gone a’ready.”

“Maybe he won’t have to stand for that.”

“Somebody’ll have to. You can’t get insurance now, you know.”

“Look out, Duke—here comes another!”

When this wave had passed, Peabody missed his companion, and looked around for him. At length he saw him, wedged in between the foremast and the timbers, grinning sheepishly; and stepping back he hauled him out. “What’s the matter with you, man? Didn’t you see it.”

“Oh, I saw it all right.”

THE STORM

"You'd better get hold here. What's the matter with your hands?"

"I dunno, sort o' numb, I guess."

"Makes me think o' the time Ryerson's house burned—just such a day as this. Three or four of us got there early and pitched in to help the firemen." He had to shout to make himself heard.

"I was up on the ladder, next under the nozzleman, holding up the slack of the hose. Well, sir, do you know the water kept dribbling down from the nozzle around my fingers until they were just about froze stiff. Finally, they let go—I couldn't help it, my fingers just straightened out. Then the slack of the hose fell and jerked the nozzle right out of the nozzleman's hands. Well, sir, I didn't hardly know what I was doing, it come so quick; but when that nozzle was tumbling down by me, and the stream swinging all around, I made a grab for it

HIS LITTLE WORLD

and caught it by the handles. And there I stood, holding on for all there was in me, and the crowd yelling. All to once it struck me the nozzleman was yelling too, and I looked up, and there I was squirt-ing a four-inch stream up under his rub-ber coat, and he was hanging on to the ladder for life. Getting colder, ain't it?"

Buckingham, with lips bluer than ever, made no reply; he looked down at his hands. Peabody's eyes roved shoreward. The lines in his face deepened as he looked; for he saw that the *Dean* was making no headway. Half an hour later Badeau beckoned him aft. When he returned he took Buckingham by the shoulder, and shook him a little. "Here, Duke, what you thinking of! Brace up! —Hunch says we'll throw off the deck load. He can't manage her at all this way. Come along—it's just what you need."

THE STORM

Through the afternoon, through the night, the storm sported with the *Dean*. It swept down from the north and forced her nearer and nearer to the breakers on Point Sable; it veered to the north-east, and blew her, with a scurry of black water, out past the point and on—on, as if to hurl her on the Wisconsin shore; it brought snow and sleet to blind the tireless wheelman, whose hands never left the spokes; it ripped the sails and set the shreds to flapping derisively; and still Badeau kept the wheel, and still his crew held their places forward. There was no talking now. There were no more yarns of sea or shore; the two men up forward were holding grimly to life, with fingers too stiffened to grip firmly—with spirits that shivered and threatened to let go.

Toward dawn Peabody groped aft. “I dunno what to do about Duke, Hunch.”

HIS LITTLE WORLD

“Hammer ‘im.”

“That don’t help much. See any signs of it’s letting up?”

Badeau shook his head.

“Do you know where we are?”

“Must be pretty near the middle of the lake. I’m going to try to work back. Stand by to come about.”

For the twentieth time that night the *Dean*, under the jib and the ruins of a foresail, pointed northeast. At Hunch’s command, Peabody climbed half-way up the shrouds and clung there. The dark began to fade, the snow-flurries ceased.

“Ho there! Hunch!—Ho there!”

“Ho—o!”

“Bray—ay—kers! Duke—Tell Hunch!”

Buckingham crawled aft. “Hunch! Bray—ay—kers!”

“Breakers be —!”

“Herm——” It was hard for Buckingham to hold his excitement, hard

THE STORM

for him to hold to anything. "Herm,
he says—"

Badeau's eyes rested on the pitiable object before him, then peered into the dark ahead. A flash came into his drawn face. "Stand by to come about!" Buckingham gazed stupidly. Hunch plunged forward and gave him a kick that sent him stumbling forward. "Ready about!"—Peabody was sliding down a stay—"Ready about!—Hard a lee!"—The men up forward could not hear him, could hardly see him; but Buckingham was fumbling with the lee jib-sheet. She swung a little way, wavered, then, caught in the rush of the surf, missed stays and floundered broadside on a bar. And the waves came pounding in over the rail.

When the morning came they were lashed in the forerigging. The main-mast was gone, the after-cabin was

HIS LITTLE WORLD

razed off flush with the deck, and the seas flowed at will through the hold.

"Can you make out where we are, Hunch?"

"Off Clinton."

"They'll see us here then?"

"The — they will. There ain't nobody lives there."

"Not in Clinton?"

"Not a soul—deserted. There's the Liddington piers, below."

"But there ain't nobody on watch."

"No—station's closed."

"Hold on though—what's that?"

"Over the pier—little sails?"

"Yes."

"That's the life-boat."

"No."

"Sure it is."

"Well, I'll be —!" murmured Peabody fervently. "The fools—they'll never make it without a tug."

THE STORM

"Couldn't never get a tug out there."

"Here they come! Is it the surf-boat?"

"Not much. It's the big English boat. Surf-boat don't carry any sail."

"They've cleared the piers! Must be a volunteer crew. What's the matter with 'em?"

"Too much sea—can't use the rudder. See there—rudder's up in the air."

"Duke—Hi, wake up! They're coming, Duke!"

Buckingham groaned.

"See' em turning 'round—they can't manage her!"

Badeau shook his head. The life-boat, while they watched, was caught up on the foaming crest of a wave, whirled around and jammed against the end of the pier. She fell back with the wave, then, freed in some way from her short masts, she rolled completely over on

HIS LITTLE WORLD

her high round air-tanks, and righting, pitched about, buoyant as ever.

"See that? Did you see, Hunch? She went over!"

"Shut up, will you?"

"Look there—they're throwing ropes. My nephew—I've got a nephew on that crew, Hunch."

"He'd better look out for his uncle, then."

"See 'em bobbing around. Must be they've got cork jackets on."

By some unseen agency the boat was got back between the piers, and the bobbing figures disappeared. The excitement passed; the beach, strewn with wreckage and driftwood, and backed by sand hills and stunted pines, looked bleaker than ever: the wind penetrated to their bones.

"What do you think o' that, Hunch? What do you think'll become—"

THE STORM

"Oh, shut up!"

An hour—two hours—and nothing but the roar of the surf, the endless white beach, the low sky.

Then Badeau reached up and shook Peabody's leg. "Wake up there, Herm! Look down the beach."

"Wha—what's that? I don't see anything."

"What are your eyes for?"

"Oh—team o' horses, eh. What's the crowd doing?"

"Can't you see the beach cart?"

"No—is it? Coming right along, ain't they."

The cart was hauled up at a spot opposite the *Dean*. Over the ice-cones Badeau and Peabody could see the crew bustling about, until suddenly the crowd fell back, and they caught the shine of a brass gun and saw a projectile leap into the air trailing a line behind it.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"Not by fifty yards! It'll take a bigger charge than that. There—they're getting out another."

Another moment of preparation, and another projectile came spinning toward them, passing high over their heads and directly between the foremast and the stump of the mainmast.

"How're we going to get 'er, Hunch? The topmast stays are down; I couldn't ever get down to that deck. Couldn't trust my hands, you see—all right except for my hands."

"You stay here, and keep still," said Badeau. He drew out his knife and cut the rope that lashed him to the shrouds; then worked his way painfully down to the deck. Holding now to the rail, now to the loose end of a stay, he fought through the waves, picked up the line, mounted with it to the cross-trees, and unaided hauled the heavier

THE STORM

line out through the surf, and made the tackle fast to the foremast. The men on shore fell to with a will and sent out the hawser; and in another moment it was fast and taut, and the breeches buoy was dancing out to the schooner.

"Easy now," said Hunch, as they lowered Buckingham into the canvas breeches.

"Lash 'im in, Hunch; lash 'im in! I'd do it—but my hands—"

They watched him without a word as the buoy went shoreward. The line sagged so low under his weight that half a dozen waves passed over him.

"They'll drown 'im!" said Peabody. Badeau was silent.

Buckingham was lifted to the beach, and the empty buoy came back.

"You go next, Hunch."

"Get in—don't stop to talk!"

"Well—you see how it is—I guess you're

HIS LITTLE WORLD

a little better off than I am. You stand it better."

"For God's sake, get in!"

Peabody snivelled a little as he swung off and went swinging down the line, his legs dangling grotesquely. Hunch clung to the ratlines, looking after him with a wild gleam in his eyes. When the buoy came back for the last time he caught it with one hand, then hesitated. He glanced down at the schooner's hull. Why should he go ashore at all? What was the use now? He looked at the crowd. They were waving at him, probably they were shouting. Then he found himself getting in and sliding off toward the shore.

CHAPTER X

JIM BARTLETT CALLS

ALL the rest of the day Hunch paced up and down on the shore ice, watching the schooner until the foremast went over and the timber was strewn for a mile along the beach.

At dusk two of the crew men came up and made Hunch go home. He spent the evening stretched out on the bed, trying to think. Later he fell asleep, and in the morning, when he awoke, his clothes felt heavy and stiff. After breakfast he went up the beach. The *Dean* was battered out of shape. Two fragments of the foremast had been cast up on the ice, but the mainmast had disappeared. He stayed until he was sure

HIS LITTLE WORLD

that the schooner was a total loss, then he returned to his room.

A year earlier in Hunch's life such a catastrophe would have set him drinking; but now, while he thought of it for a moment, the idea of a bout in Herve's bar-room with the old crowd of loafers, who would know exactly why he had come, and would, before the night was over, probably know all about his state of mind, did not appeal to him. He could not bring himself to go to Bartlett's; he did not want Jess to see him when he was weak and unable to help himself. But on the second evening after the wreck, Jim Bartlett came up and found him lying on the bed with his clothes on.

"Good evening, Hunch," he said.
"Kind of hard luck; ain't it?"

"Sit down," said Hunch.

"Thanks, can't stay but a minute. I

JIM BARTLETT CALLS

just wanted to talk to you—you see I've been talking with Jess. She's all broke up about the schooner. 'Most as bad as you are. She thinks a lot of you, Hunch. She says you ain't been 'round."

"No, I ain't yet."

"She says she didn't know whether you was coming or not."

"I dunno's there's much good in seeing her."

"You mean things is different?"

"It don't make much difference what I mean." Jim's face was not very sympathetic, and Hunch was not in a mood to open his heart.

"Well—I'll be square, Hunch—it's as much what I think as what she thinks—but she can't help thinking—well, you see how it is yourself, Hunch. You ain't in just the position you was in before. It's different—it can't help being different."

"What's she want to do?"

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"Now, don't take it mean, Hunch; but she don't see—and I must say I don't either—that things ought to be just as they was."

"No, I don't s'pose so."

"But you'll come around and see us anyhow, Hunch, won't you, and talk it over. Mebbe Jess won't feel this way."

"No," said Hunch, "that ain't no use."

Bartlett stood at the door.

"I'm sorry you feel this way, Hunch, I—well, I guess there ain't much else to say."

"No, I guess there ain't."

Bartlett went out and closed the door. Hunch lay still for a long time, wondering over the turn of events. Now that it was settled, and in spite of the hurt a strong man feels when the control of his actions is taken away from him, he began to feel a slight sense of relief. Anyway, he had his strength left, and he was free to begin again.

CHAPTER XI

STARTING FRESH

BADEAU lost his schooner before Christmas. The day after New Year's he went to Manistee to see Mr. Jackson, whom he found sitting in his office.

"Well, Badeau," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"I want a job."

"What can you do?"

"Anything."

"What's the matter? Up against it?"

"You know my schooner's gone."

"Yes, I know." And Mr. Jackson also knew that Hunch was a good man. "Tell you what I'll do, Badeau; I'll make a place for you. How are you on logs?"

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"I was boss of Dempsey's gang up to Cadillac four years ago."

"How much money do you want?"

"'Nough to keep me going. You'll find out what I'm worth fast enough."

Badeau went to work the next morning. He took a cheap room near the lumber-yard, and found before the week was out that he could live on two-thirds of his salary. At the beginning of the second week, Mr. Jackson put him in charge of the river gang, driving logs. Hunch took advantage of the mild weather to get all the logs in the river to the mill before the river should freeze up solid for the winter. He got along well with the men, excepting a fellow named McGuire, who was inclined to grumble at hard work. But one noon at the mill, when the men were matching their strength, Hunch lifted a six-hundred pound pile-driver weight and

STARTING FRESH

swung it easily clear of the ground. That quieted McGuire.

One day toward the close of his second week, Badeau found Bruce Considine hanging around, at closing time, outside the mill.

"Hello, Bruce," he said. "What you doing up here?"

"Come up to see you, Hunch."

"What's the matter?"

"The old man come down on me last week."

"Fire you?"

"Yes. I'm sick of working for him anyhow. He'll never let a fellow alone."

"What you going to do? You ain't likely to get another job like that."

"I don't know. I thought mebbe you'd know of something up here, Hunch."

"I just went on the job, myself."

"I know it, but I can't starve, Hunch.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

I ain't had any money for a couple of days."

"How about—your—"

"Mame? She's down at the house. I told her to go to the old man, but he's kind of ugly and she wont do it. Guess she'll get over being proud one of these days."

"What's she living on?"

"I thought mebbe I could send her something, if I could get a job up here."

"I dunno, Bruce. I'll ask the boss. Come around to-morrow noon."

The following afternoon Bruce joined Hunch's gang as a day-laborer. His muscles were soft, and it was several days before he could do a man's work. One day the gang were carrying heavy timbers at the mill, and Hunch noticed that Bruce's partner on one of the double timber-hooks was muttering. He

STARTING FRESH

kept an eye on the pair, and saw that Bruce's hands sagged at every few steps. When the day's work was done he waited outside the mill for Bruce.

"Look here, Bruce," he said, "I'm on to you."

"What you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about. I seen you soldiering. I just want to tell you that it won't go."

Bruce was silent for a moment. Then he said:

"Think you've got me down, don't you."

"What I think ain't got nothing to do with it. I got you the job, but I can't keep you if you don't take a brace. The boss wouldn't stand for it. You got to earn your pay."

"It's easy for you to talk. You're getting good money. I'm working hard enough for every cent I get."

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"None o' your talk now, Bruce. You can't bluff me. You just quit loafing and get down to business. You're going to do it, too, if I have to knock it into you. Understand?"

Bruce walked away in a surly mood, but for a few days Hunch saw a slight improvement in his work. Then there came a slump. Hunch said nothing until one noon he overheard Bruce and McGuire grumbling together. He called Bruce away.

"Look here, Bruce," he said, "you know what I told you."

"What you got to kick about?"

"None o' your lip. You just keep away from McGuire."

"I don't see what you got to say about a friend of mine."

"Friend of yours, eh? I s'pose you're bunking with him, too?"

"Well, whose business is it if——"

STARTING FRESH

"You leave him to-night. Understand?"

Bruce sulked for the rest of the day and avoided Hunch. After supper Hunch went to McGuire's room in the square frame hotel by the tracks. No one was there, but Bruce's patent-leather valise lay in the corner. Hunch waited until they came in.

"Hello," said Bruce, a little startled.

"Pack up your stuff and come along with me, Bruce."

"Bruce is rooming with me," said McGuire, looking at Hunch out of the corners of his eyes.

"No, he ain't," said Hunch, "he's rooming with me. Step lively, Bruce. I been waiting half an hour."

Bruce and McGuire looked at each other, and Hunch sat grimly on the bed. Then Bruce turned to the bureau and began nervously gathering his things

HIS LITTLE WORLD

and throwing them into the valise. McGuire helped him without a word. Then Bruce shook hands with McGuire, a little stiffly, and went away with Hunch.

Now, that he was directly under Hunch's eye, Bruce improved slightly. He fell into the habit of confiding in Hunch, and relying, as in the old days, upon his advice. But one day a letter came for Bruce, addressed in a hand which Hunch recognized. Bruce was quiet and serious for hours, and when Hunch asked him what was the matter, he tried to pass it over with a laugh. It was not until after supper, when they were up in the room together, that Bruce gave way. Hunch was shaving, and Bruce sat watching him for some time, before he said :

"Hunch, I—got a letter from Mame."

Hunch could see him in the mirror leaning forward in his chair with his elbows on his knees.

STARTING FRESH

"She—she's coming down kind of hard on me. I ain't had a chance to earn anything yet. It's all I can do to take care of myself."

"Ain't you sent her anything?"

"Why, how could I? You know what I'm getting, Hunch."

"What's the matter?"

"She says they're sticking her for the house rent. I don't know what to do. I wish she'd go back to her old man."

"How much are you stuck for?"

"I don't know. You read it. Mebbe you can tell me what to do. Seems if she ought to help a little, somehow."

Hunch leaned against the wall, under the bracket lamp, and read the letter. Then he laid it on the bureau and stood stropping his razor on the palm of his hand. Finally he turned to the mirror and went on shaving.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"What do you think, Hunch?" asked Bruce, after a long silence.

"I dunno."

"Tell me something, Hunch. I got to do something."

"Shut up a while. Lemme think."

When he had finished shaving, Hunch said :

"To-day's Thursday, ain't it?"

"Guess so."

"Look here, Bruce, you write her a letter. Tell her I'm coming down Sunday."

"You, Hunch——?"

"Yes, I'm going down. Tell her, we'll see if we can't fix it up somehow."

Bruce looked up at him.

"Seems to me you're kind of anxious to see my wife."

Hunch turned on him.

"Look here, Bruce. Do you want to know why I'm going?"

STARTING FRESH

Bruce nodded slowly.

"It's 'cause if I gave you any money to go down there you'd blow it in and make a fool of yourself. You ain't fit to have a wife, that's why. You owe me money now that I give you for your wife and you soaked it in on jags. Don't you talk to me. Understand?"

Bruce stood by the window, looking out into the dark. Hunch was bending over the washbowl and splashing water on the floor. He groped for the towel. Bruce said: "What you got mad about all of a sudden?"

Hunch's face was buried in the towel. Bruce watched him.

"What you going to say to her, Hunch?"

"I dunno."

"Say, you ain't going to say nothing about me, are you?"

Hunch glanced at him contemptu-

HIS LITTLE WORLD

ously, and began to hone his razor. Bruce stood around for a while, then moved slowly toward the door.

"Where're you going?"

"I dunno. Thought I might go up town. Guess there ain't much of anything going on."

"You come back."

Bruce laughed nervously.

"Ain't mad, are you, Hunch?"

"No, I ain't mad. Better write that letter, I guess."

"That's so. I was going to do that, wasn't I. I kind of forgot it." He sat at the table and took up the pen clumsily. "I don't know just what to say, Hunch."

"That's your business."

"Don't be mean, Hunch."

"You shut up and write that letter. I don't care what you say."

When he had written it, and before

STARTING FRESH

sealing the envelope, Bruce hesitated and looked around at Hunch. But Hunch had turned his back and was honing without a word, so Bruce sealed it.

"It's wrote, Hunch. I told her—"

"Give it to me. I'll mail it in a minute. You be here now when I get back."

CHAPTER XII

HUNCH AND MAMIE

HUNCH went down to Liddington Sunday morning on the combination freight and passenger train. Bruce had come to the station with him, and stood looking after the train for a long time after it had pulled away. Hunch saw him through the rear window.

It was a crisp January morning. The snow had come and the train rattled through a flat, white country, cut into strips as far as one could see by the straight up and down lines of the black pine stumps. At Liddington Hunch went up to the white brick hotel on the main street and ate his dinner alone. He walked up and down for an hour after dinner, trying to think

HUNCH AND MAMIE

clearly about Mamie and Bruce. Now, that he was on the ground, he was not sure why he had come. But it drew near three o'clock, and he walked out to Bruce's cottage.

At first there was no answer to his knock. The curtains were down, and the snow had not been cleared away from the steps. He knocked again and rattled the knob. He heard some one moving. A little later an inside door opened, and then, after some fumbling with the lock, Mamie opened the door. She was pale and thin. A shawl was drawn over her head and shoulders.

"Oh!" she said, then smiled. "How do you do, Mister Badeau?"

Hunch stepped in and closed the door.

"What's the matter?" he said. "You ain't sick?"

"No, just a little under the weather. Come in and sit down."

HIS LITTLE WORLD

The front room was cold.

"Ain't you got no fire?" Hunch asked.

"Yes, I made a little fire in the kitchen this morning. I can sit out there, you know. I don't need any in here. Guess we'd better go out there anyhow, where it's warmer."

"You go ahead," said Hunch; then, "Where's your wood? I'll make a fire here."

"Oh, no, you mustn't?"

"Now you just leave me be, Mis' Considine. You set down in the kitchen and lemme fix you up. Where's the wood?"

"It's out here in the box," said Mamie, opening the kitchen door.

Hunch saw why she was sparing of wood. There were only a few armfuls. But he built a roaring fire in the front room, and then took the ax out into

HUNCH AND MAMIE

the back yard and split up a heap of boards and timber waste that lay under the snow. Mamie watched him through the window. After a few strokes he grew warm from the exercise, and taking off his coat he handed it through the door to Mamie, and said, "Warm weather, ain't it?" Mamie was smiling when she reappeared at the window. Hunch filled the wood box and laid a large pile on the floor at each end. Then he put on his coat.

"Well," he said, "that's more like. Pull up a chair, Mis' Considine."

"You must be hungry, Mr. Badeau, after all that work. I'm going to make you some coffee, anyway."

"Now, don't you do nothing of the sort. That ain't work? That's just fun." Unconsciously he expanded his chest as he spoke. In spite of his bent shoulders, it was a deep, rounded chest,

HIS LITTLE WORLD

different from Bruce's. Mamie did not know that there was admiration in her eyes as she watched him.

"Now, you've got to let me, Mr. Badeau. I don't have company very often. You just sit still and let me work awhile. I'm not doing my share."

So Hunch sat by the stove and watched her as she stepped about the kitchen. Her manner had brightened, and there was a flush on her cheeks. She took pains to keep the pantry door closed, but once Hunch caught a glimpse inside and saw that the shelves were nearly bare. While drinking the coffee they both felt a slight restraint. Occasionally when their eyes met, Mamie would lower hers and laugh nervously. They talked of old times, and Hunch recalled, somewhat awkwardly, the day he had first met her on the beach by the life-saving station.

HUNCH AND MAMIE

Then there was a long pause, and Hunch said, "Look here, Mis' Considine, there ain't no use trying to make me think things that ain't so is so. I'm going down town and bring up something to eat."

Mamie flushed.

"Now, don't say nothing. You just leave me be and we'll fix things up in great shape."

Mamie tried to protest, but Hunch put on his ulster and started up the street, saying over his shoulder as he went down the steps, "I'll be back in no time."

He found Joe Cartier, who kept the grocery and meat market across from the hotel, at his house, and made him open his store and put up a large bundle of provisions. When he returned, Mamie was at the front window. She hurried to open the door.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"Come on and we'll have a blow-out," said Hunch, as he cut the string and spread the packages over the kitchen table. "There's a good many of the things that don't have to be cooked at all. I got some preserve —thought you might like it. Do you? It's peach."

Mamie's eyes were hesitating between laughter and tears, but she nodded quickly and the laugh triumphed. Then they both set to work. Hunch laid the table-cloth, and puttered about clumsily, while Mamie prepared the meal. Mamie laughed at his awkwardness, and after a time grew so cheerful that she joked him and made him blush through the bronze on his face. And they sat facing each other across the table, with all the lively chatter of two foolish young people. Afterward she washed the dishes and he wiped them.

HUNCH AND MAMIE

But when it was finished and they sat before the stove in the front room, the sense of restraint returned. For a long time neither spoke. They looked at the two cracked mica windows in the stove door, which glowed redly when the flames leaped up behind them. It was Mamie who finally broke the silence.

"Is—Bruce well?"

"He's—he's pretty well. He didn't feel quite able to come down to-day. You know we're bunking together. You see, I know about—now, you mustn't think I'm poking my nose into none of my business. I and Bruce was together a good while, and we come to know a good deal about each other, o' course."

Mamie was looking at the stove windows. The wood in the stove had fallen, sending up sparks and shoots of flame that danced grotesquely on the mica.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"You see, if there's anything I can do, 't aint's if I was doing a favor. It's just that mebbe I was lucky in getting a place that pays a little more'n Bruce's. And you see he'd do just the same by me if it come that I was kind of on my uppers."

Mamie was still silent.

"Now, you just be sensible—'cause it's all sort of in the family, you know—and tell me how it is about the rent, and mebbe we can kind of patch things up, because three heads is better 'n two. Understand?"

Mamie leaned back in her chair and rested her face in her hands. When Hunch looked at her he saw that she was crying, and he waited till she should speak. Finally she said, "I don't know just what we're going to do. It—it's only that there's some one else wants the house and we—of course—"

HUNCH AND MAMIE

"Yes, of course," said Hunch.

"I thought, maybe I ought to take a room somewhere."

"That's so. Something smaller. I dunno but what's like as not you'd feel better anyhow. This is a pretty big house for a little bit of a thing like you. Mebbe 's long as Bruce is working up to Manistee you could get a room and sort of keep house for yourself. Be kind of snug, don't you think so?"

"Tell you what," he said, after they had sat for several minutes without talking, "I'll see what we can do." He rose and put on his coat. Mamie watched him, but seemed unable to reply, and let him go out without a word.

He returned an hour later. Mamie was still sitting by the stove.

"It's all fixed up," he said, shaking the snow from his coat. "You're going over to Cartier's. They've got a big

HIS LITTLE WORLD

room for you, and he's going to see that you get moved all right. You can take your meals right in the house. And 'twon't cost you hardly anything. Now, you just drop them blues and we'll see if we can't get you fatter'n you ever was. You're a-going to have a good time yet this winter. And Bruce'll come down Sundays. I've got to get the train. Guess I might 's well start along."

She got up slowly and followed him to the door. Neither knew what to say. Hunch buttoned his ulster and drew on one of his big fur mittens. He looked at his hand, big and freckled, with hard, knotted fingers and broken nails. He held it out hurriedly and said, "Well—good-by."

She took his hand shyly. Suddenly she bent down and kissed it, and a tear dropped on it. Hunch pulled his hand away.

HUNCH AND MAMIE

"Oh, don't do that—"

She looked up into his face. She did not seem to care now if he saw her crying.

Hunch forgot that he had shaken hands and he took hers again, this time with his mitten on. Then he opened the door and hurried out. She stood at the window looking after him as he walked down the street, but he did not turn around.

CHAPTER XIII

A DARK DAY AT LIDDINGTON

BRUCE came down to the station in the evening, and was standing on the platform when Hunch stepped off the train. They walked up together and were half-way to the room, before Bruce said, "Say, Hunch, how about it?"

"It's bad. She didn't have enough to eat or keep her warm. She's going to live at Joe Cartier's place and take her meals there. It's a good deal cheaper'n the other. I told her you was coming down Sundays."

"What'd you say to her, Hunch? What'd she say? Anything special? Tell me about it."

A DARK DAY

"Guess there ain't nothing to tell."

"Seems to me it's kind of funny if a man can't find out nothing about his own wife. You was down there and you see her all day. I don't see why I ain't got a right to know about it."

"Oh, shut up. You ain't got a right to nothing from the way you've treated her."

"Look here, Hunch Badeau, you've got to tell me."

"How long you been saying what I got to do and what I ain't got to do?"

"That's all right, but—"

"Yes, it's dead right."

Bruce stopped and took Hunch's arm.

"Take your hand off me."

Bruce's hand dropped.

"Now, don't get ugly, Hunch. I just wanted to know about her. I ain't seen her for a good while."

"Well, do you think that's my fault?

HIS LITTLE WORLD

I'll tell you about her. She's fixed up where she's got enough to eat and drink, she's got people to talk to and chirp her up, and she's waiting for you to come down next Sunday. If you're man enough to keep straight and go down there and do the square thing, you won't find me in your way. If you ain't, you can go to hell for all I care."

Bruce was silent, and they climbed to the room and went to bed.

A day or two later Mr. Jackson sent for Hunch.

"Badeau," he said, "how about this man Considine?"

"How do you mean?"

"What kind of work is he doing?"

"All right as far's I can see."

"He's a friend of yours, ain't he?"

"Yes, he used to work for me when I had the schooner."

"I'll tell you, Badeau, I've had some

A DARK DAY

complaints about him. You know I don't want any man that can't do the work."

"I think he's doing pretty good, sir."

"Well, I'll count on you to keep an eye on him. If you catch him loafing, don't waste any time on him."

Hunch went over the conversation in the evening with Bruce. It frightened Bruce, and he made promises which he kept for the rest of the week.

They did not talk about Mamie until Saturday night, after they had been sitting by the stove for a long time in silence. Bruce was nervous.

"Say, Hunch," he said, "would you go down if you was me?"

"Where?"

"You know—down to Mame's to-morrow."

"Would I go? What you talking about?"

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"I don't know. What do you s'pose she'll say?"

"I guess you know what she ought to say, all right."

"Do you think she'll be mad?"

"Oh, you shut up!"

Bruce went to bed early, but Hunch heard him tossing until late. In the morning he was moody.

"Hunch," he said, after breakfast, "what time does the train go down?"

"Bout half an hour."

"Say, I s'pose I might as well take it as the noon train."

"That's your business—'tain't mine."

"Well, I guess I will. Say, Hunch, I'll tell you—s'pose you come along."

"Guess not."

"I don't mean nothing, Hunch, but you've been talking to her, and you know how to kind of quiet her. I never could, somehow."

A DARK DAY

"Look here, Bruce, I ain't going to-day or any day. I ain't going at all. Understand? You needn't tell her I said that, though."

"Guess I'd better be starting, eh, Hunch?"

"Guess you had."

"Come on down to the depot. You ain't got nothing to do."

At the station, Hunch said: "Got any money?"

"No, I ain't got much."

"Here's a little. No drinking, now."

"On my honor, Hunch, I won't drink a drop. Do you think a man would drink when he's going down to see his own wife, Hunch? Do you think——"

"You better get aboard."

"Good-by, Hunch, I'll get back to-night."

In the evening Hunch met the Lid-dington train. Bruce did not get off.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

Hunch looked for him Monday morning, but had no word of him. At noon he was called to Mr. Jackson's office.

"Badeau," said his employer, "when that Considine gets back to work, you send him to me for his time."

Hunch hesitated. "I'll tell you, Mr. Jackson, he went down yesterday to see his wife. Their kid died a little while ago, and like's not she's sick."

"Think so?"

"My work is pretty light to-day. I thought mebbe I could get off for the afternoon train and sort of look him up. I can get back to-night, you know. You see, if he gets laid off it'll come kind of hard on his wife."

"All right, go ahead. But, say, Badeau, hold on a minute. We're not running a charity hospital, you know. We can't give that man much rope."

Hunch said, "Yes, sir," and went out.

A DARK DAY

He reached Liddington at supper time and picked up a hasty meal at the hotel. Then he hurried over to Joe Cartier's house. Cartier let him in.

"Hello, Joe," said Hunch. "Bruce here?"

Cartier hesitated.

"Yes, I guess he's upstairs."

"I want to see him."

"Well; say, Hunch, come in the parlor a minute. I want to talk to you."

"What's the matter?"

"Well, you know Bruce came down yesterday morning, and 'long about noon I guess they quarrelled a little. Me and my wife, we didn't listen, but we couldn't help hearing Bruce talk. And then Bruce went out—"

"Oh," said Hunch, "drunk?"

"Not so bad as I've seen him, but he come in kind of ugly, and he's got some up there—brought it back with him.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

Seems kind of too bad. I didn't feel quite 's if I could do anything. You see 't ain't really none of my business."

Hunch went upstairs and knocked at the door. There was a stir inside, and he could hear Bruce grumbling and Mamie whispering. Then Mamie opened the door a few inches. When she looked at Hunch, the color left her face and she leaned against the door.

"It's all right," said Hunch, "I come for him."

"Oh," faltered Mamie.

"Who's there?" called Bruce. "Who you whispering to?"

Mamie hesitated and looked at Hunch. He gently brushed her aside, saying, "Lemme come in."

"Who is it?" said Bruce. He was lying on the bed, his clothing mussed, his face red. Hunch stood by the bed and looked down at him.

A DARK DAY

"What you doing here?" growled Bruce. "What right you got coming in a man's house?"

Hunch looked at his watch.

"Come on," he said, "we've got to get back on this train."

"Who's goin' back. I ain't goin' back. Go on out o' here, will you?"

Hunch took his arm and pulled him up. Bruce sat on the edge of the bed.

"Come on, Bruce, get moving."

"Go 'way."

Hunch turned to Mamie.

"Where's his hat, Mis' Considine?"

Bruce stood up.

"What's that? What you saying to my wife? Tha's my wife, Hunch Badeau. She's a lady. You can't talk to my wife."

Mamie stood at the foot of the bed watching the two men nervously.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"Bruce," said Hunch, "shut up and come along."

"Don't you think you'd better go, dear?" said Mamie, timidly.

"Wha's that? You want to get rid of me too, eh? Oh, I'm on to you two. You can't fool me; you can't. You're pretty smart, Hunch Badeau, sneaking down to see my wife—"

Hunch gripped Bruce's arm and jerked him out of the room. They were at the top of the stairs when Mamie came to the door.

"Here's his hat," she said. "You'd better take it, I guess."

"Thanks," said Hunch, without looking at her, and he hurried Bruce down the stairs.

CHAPTER XIV

CONSIDINE'S WORK IS ENDED

THE next morning Bruce was still in bed when Hunch went to work. McGuire did not appear with the other men, and at noon his brass check still hung on its nail in the timekeeper's shanty. Shortly after lunch Bruce and McGuire, both a little the worse for drink, appeared and went to work with the gang. Hunch had gone up to the mill, and did not see them until his return. When he came near they were dawdling over their work, chuckling together over some incident of the morning.

"What you two doing here?" Hunch asked.

Bruce started and moved away from McGuire.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"Speak up."

McGuire muttered, "Guess we know what we're doing."

"Look here," said Hunch, "you go to the office and get your time."

McGuire lowered his cant-hook.

"What—what you say?"

"Go on. Don't talk to me."

McGuire dropped his cant-hook and started away.

"Come back here, McGuire. Pick that up."

McGuire muttered.

"What's that you're saying?"

"I ain't saying nothing."

Hunch started toward him, but checked himself.

"Pick up that cant-hook, McGuire."

McGuire obeyed and walked slowly away. Hunch turned to Bruce, who stood looking on with his mouth open.

CONSIDINE'S WORK ENDED

"What are you gaping there for, Considine. Go 'long."

"Where?"

"Go and get your time. We're through with you."

Bruce stood still looking stupidly at Hunch.

"What?" he said. "You ain't—"

"Get off the job. Understand? You're laid off. We don't want you."

Bruce slowly lifted his cant-hook to his shoulder. He stared at Hunch until Hunch turned away, then he walked over to where McGuire was standing, and went away with him.

Late in the afternoon they came back and hung around, watching the gang at work. They had been drinking again, and McGuire had a bottle in his pocket which he pulled out frequently. They were talking loud and laughing.

Their actions drew the attention of the

HIS LITTLE WORLD

men and annoyed Badeau, though he said nothing for a long time. Finally, Bruce and McGuire began calling at the men, growing bolder in their remarks. At last McGuire called, "You fellows mus' like working for tha' dam' fool," and Hunch walked toward them.

"You'll have to move away from here," he said. "We can't have you disturbing the work."

"Go 'way!" McGuire replied. "You can't touch us. We ain't on your job."

"Stop that, McGuire! Get out, quick, or I'll throw you out!"

McGuire laughed. Hunch went to him and pulled him to his feet.

"Le' go o' me!" said McGuire. "Take your hand off o' me!"

Hunch began dragging him away. McGuire hung back protesting and threatening. Bruce walked slowly after them, shaking his head and talking to him-

CONSIDINE'S WORK ENDED

self. McGuire braced his feet. Hunch gave him a wrench that nearly threw him, and McGuire struck at him. Bruce watched the struggle, the old drunken cunning in his eyes, then he ran forward and jumped on Hunch's back, pounding him about the face and head. Hunch staggered, but recovered and caught McGuire with his knuckles squarely on the side of the jaw. McGuire staggered back. Bruce had both arms around Hunch's neck and was trying to choke him. Hunch gripped Bruce's wrists, and slowly pulled them forward, until their hold was loosened; then he turned quickly, took hold of Bruce's shoulders, and threw him against a pile of cut timber. Bruce struck hard and seemed for a moment to be clinging to the pile, then he fell on his face.

Some of the men were running toward them. One was calling:

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"I seen it, Hunch! It weren't your fault! I seen it!"

Hunch stood panting as the men gathered around.

"Better see if he's hurt," he said.

They rolled Bruce over. His face was covered with blood. One of the men brought some water from the river in his hat, and washed it off.

McGuire stood at one side, rubbing his cheek. Hunch ordered him away, and he went without a word. The other men were crowding around Bruce. One of them looked up and said: "I guess he's done for, Hunch."

CHAPTER XV

THE LETTER

IT was a cold day in Manistee. The snow lay in high banks on each side of the street-car tracks, with paths cut through at the crossings and in front of the larger stores; underfoot it creaked and crunched. Men walked briskly, keeping their hands in their pockets or holding them over ears or noses, and pausing at the drug store on the corner to look at the red thermometer.

It was close to noon, and a number of men were coming down a flight of stairs which reached the sidewalk a few doors beyond the drug store. The last one was Hunch Badeau, with his ulster collar turned up, his cap pulled down over his ears, and his fur mittens on.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

When they reached the street two of the other men turned and shook hands with him; but he had nothing to say, and a moment later he was walking alone, slowly, up the bridge approach. The examination was over and he was free. His case had not reached a trial, for he had killed Considine plainly in self-defense.

A long row of schooners, steamers, and tugs lay along the docks on both sides of the river. On most of the schooners a length of stovepipe came out of a cabin window, and a few wisps of smoke, winding lazily out to be snatched away by the wind, showed that many a sailor was lying dormant during the winter months. Hunch lingered on the bridge. He had once spent such a winter in Chicago on a big schooner, locked up snugly in the North Branch near Goose Island, eating and sleeping, smoking and swap-

THE LETTER

ping yarns, and helping to drink up somebody's summer profits. That was a long while ago; it seemed to Hunch a dim part of some past life, before he had ever met a woman other than the rough girls of the Chicago levee and the North Peninsula stockades.

Mr. Jackson had told Hunch that he need not go back to work that day, so he climbed to his room and sat on the chair by the window. Bruce's things were lying about the room; his razor on the bureau, his Sunday clothes over a chair in the closet, his shoes under the foot of the bed. Hunch got up and began to get them together, without knowing exactly why he was doing it. He packed what he could in the patent-leather valise, and made up the rest into bundles, borrowing paper and string from the landlady. Then he sat down again, but before long, too restless to stay

HIS LITTLE WORLD

alone, he put on his coat and walked out to the mill. Mr. Jackson was standing near the waste dump with a memorandum book in his hand.

"Well, Badeau, what's the matter?"

"Nothing. Guess I might's well get to work."

"Just as you like."

The men looked surprised when he joined them. He was nervous and he worked both himself and them at a pace that wore them out in a few hours. But at six o'clock, when the whistle blew, and he put on his coat and went back to the boarding-house, he felt refreshed.

On Sunday, after several days of hesitating over the best way to get Bruce's things to Mamie, Hunch gathered up the bundles and the valise, and took the noon train to Liddington. He sat for two hours in the station before he could make up his mind to take them

THE LETTER

to Joe Cartier's house. When he finally knocked at the door, Joe's wife opened it.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Badeau? Come in, won't you?"

"No, I can't," said Hunch. "Hold on; yes, I will, too, just a minute. Where's Joe?"

"Here he is," replied Joe himself, coming through the hall in his shirt-sleeves. "Come in, and set down."

Hunch stepped in and dropped the bundles in the corner.

"Can I speak to you a minute, Joe?"

"Sure thing. Walk in the front room. Martha, I could swear Hunch ain't had his dinner. Fetch out some of the chicken and potatoes. It ain't so hot as it was, Hunch, but it's good, plain stuff—good enough for us, ain't it, Martha?"

"No, don't you, Mis' Cartier. I can't stay, honest. I had some grub, anyhow."

HIS LITTLE WORLD

But Joe's wife hurried out to the kitchen, leaving Joe and Hunch in the front room.

"Take off your coat, man," said Joe. "What you getting so bashful about all of a sudden?"

Hunch unbuttoned his coat, nervously.

"Is she staying here yet, Joe?"

"Who's that you mean, Hunch? Bruce's wife? She's going up to her father's tomorrow."

"How's that happen?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Hunch—you won't say anything about it, of course—but when Bruce—when he died, you know, and I knowed that girl didn't have a cent anywhere, and worse'n that, if you count *his* debts, I just thought—kind of—that the old man, he didn't know quite how things stood, or he wouldn't be so ugly. You see, don't you?"

Hunch nodded.

THE LETTER

"And, of course, I couldn't say nothing to her, you know, 'cause she'd think first thing I meant about the rent—she's a touchy little thing, you know—so I says to Martha, 'Martha, you just take your work'—this was Thursday—'Martha,' I says, 'you just take your work and go up to Mis' Banks' and set down and have a good old jaw with the old lady. She'll let you talk to her,' I says, 'cause she used to be your Sunday-school teacher, and she's always took a shine to you. And you just lay out the whole thing, and tell her that if she ain't wanting to lose the respect of one grocer in this town, she'd better just leave go of one of those missionary societies of hers, and watch out a little for her own daughter.' Martha, she felt kind of delicate about going, but she went down just the same, and tackled the old lady, and when she come back, her eyes were

HIS LITTLE WORLD

like she'd been crying, so I know'd it was all right and I didn't say nothing. And, sure enough, that night old Banks himself come around and stood up stiff in the door and says, 'Is my daughter here, Cartier?'—He always calls me 'Joe,' you know, and I calls him 'George'; but that ain't no matter.—I says, 'Yes,' and he goes upstairs, and then Martha and I, we just keeps out of the way in the kitchen, so's he could go out without running into any of us. But 'long about half-past nine he comes out, and knocks on the kitchen door, and says, 'My daughter's coming to my house, Joe.' And I says, 'When?' and he says, 'Monday, and let me know what the board'll amount to?' And you see, Hunch, I was kind of foolish myself, so I just says, 'All right, George,' and then he goes out. So the girl's going to keep alive, anyhow, and that's something."

THE LETTER

Hunch rose and slowly buttoned his ulster.

"You give her them things, won't you, Joe? I dunno as I'd say anything about my bringing them down."

"Why, hold on, man; you ain't going now. Martha's out getting some dinner for you."

"Sorry," said Hunch. "I got to get back."

"Oh, pshaw, Hunch; this ain't right. Wait a minute, anyhow. I guess Mis' Considine would like to see you. She's right upstairs."

"No," said Hunch, slowly, "she don't want to see me." Cartier looked at him a little surprised, then suddenly grew embarrassed.

"I forgot," he said; "I clean forgot. No, I don't s'pose she does."

Hunch turned and felt for the door-knob. Mrs. Cartier was coming in

HIS LITTLE WORLD

from the kitchen, and she hurried forward.

"Don't let him go now, Joe. His dinner's all ready."

"That's right," Joe urged. "You see, you can't go, Hunch."

"I'm sorry," said Hunch. "Good day." He hurried out, and left Joe and his wife looking at each other.

Hunch had been back in Manistee nearly a week, when one day he received a letter in a perfumed envelope, like the ones Bruce used to get, when they were together on the schooner. He carried it in his pocket all the afternoon, and at night, wondering what she could have to say, and yet not daring to open it and find out, he set it upon his bureau, taking it up every few minutes and turning it over in his hands. In the morning when he awoke and got out of bed to dress, it was there on the bureau staring

THE LETTER

at him. He held it up to the light several times, then tore off the end of the envelope and drew out the letter. It was a stiffly worded little note, thanking him for bringing Bruce's things, and was signed, "Yours truly, Mary Considine." Hunch could not tell why it made him happy. He read it over and over—the first letter she had ever written to him. He stood by the lamp, holding it in his hand.

Then, suddenly, he thought of Bruce, and the letter dropped to the table and lay there for a long time untouched, while he dressed with clumsy fingers. But before he went out to work he put it away in his inside pocket. It stayed there for a long time, and sometimes in the evenings, long afterward, he would take it out and read it.

CHAPTER XVI

POP-CORN BALLS

HUNCH worked hard during the rest of the winter, so hard that he was startled one day, after two weeks up country in the logging camp, to find that March was only a week away. He had been sent to take charge of the logging gang while the regular foreman was getting back on his legs after an ax cut. When he returned to the mill, and reported at the office, Mr. Jackson waved him to a chair.

"Sit down a minute, Badeau. I want to talk to you. How do you like your work, anyhow?"

"It's all right, sir."

"How do you get along with the men? Have any trouble?"

POP-CORN BALLS

“Not lately.”

“Would you like to go back on the lake?”

“Wouldn’t mind.”

“You’ve had a good deal of experience, haven’t you?”

“Guess so.”

“What have you done besides running that little schooner you had?”

“Well, I was mate two years on one of Peters’s coal schooners, and before that I knocked around a good while getting on to the ropes.”

“Now, I’ll tell you, Badeau, we’re going to put on a big schooner this year. She’s the *Robert James*.”

“I know,” said Hunch, “a three sticker. Belongs to the Wilsons. Stud Marble’s been sailing her.”

“That’s the boat. Well, we’ve bought her, and she’s going out March eleventh with that Menominee bill. If you think

HIS LITTLE WORLD

you'd like to take her out, say so, and you can have her. We've named her the *Lucy Jackson.*"

Hunch looked down at his cap and then up at the yellow-and-red lithograph, that hung over Mr. Jackson's desk, of Maud S., rounding into the home stretch. He did not know what to say.

"Speak up, Badeau. Do you want it?"

"Yes, sir, I'll try it."

"We don't want you to try it; we want you to do it. There mustn't be any doubt about it."

"There ain't any. I can do it."

"All right. Come in again some day this week, and we'll fix up the details. You might be picking up a crew. And you'd better go down and look her over. She's at Wilson's dock."

Hunch spent the day in going over the schooner, setting things to right and

POP-CORN BALLS

taking an inventory of repairs. For the next two weeks he worked day and night, eating and sleeping when he could. Then exactly on time, the *Lucy Jackson* was ready, and she sailed for Menominee with Hunch at the wheel and a hundred and ten thousand feet of lumber on the deck.

The spring and summer months slipped by. Hunch was kept so busy delivering cargoes at nearly every port on the lake down to Chicago and Michigan City, and once going around through the straits to Alpena, that he kept little track of the time. He was usually at Liddington at least once a month, but he stayed only a day or so at a time, and then kept aboard the schooner as much as possible.

It was in October, nine months after his talk with Joe Cartier, that he met Mamie's father in the street in Liddington. Hunch had gone to the post-office,

HIS LITTLE WORLD

expecting orders from Mr. Jackson, and was hurrying back to the schooner to see about unloading her cargo. Banks was coming down the steps from the bank.

"Hello, Badeau," he said, holding out his hand. "Where've you been all this time?"

"Busy," said Hunch, taking the hand, and wishing that he could get away.

"Where are you now? Up to Manistee?"

"I s'pose I hail from there 's much as anywherees."

"On the lake again, ain't you. One of the boys told me you was getting up in the world."

"Oh, I ain't very much yet."

"You're cap'n of a big schooner, I hear."

"Yes. How's all your folks?"

"Pretty well. Mamie was sick for a

POP-CORN BALLS

while, but I guess she's all right now. Let's see, it's most a year since I saw you. Don't you ever get down here?"

"Not very often."

"How long 're you here for?"

"Guess I can get away to-morrow some time."

"You'll be around to-night, won't you? Mamie and the old lady 'll never forgive you if you go away without seeing us."

"Why—"

"Look here, now, Badeau, I'm going to send Frank down with the rig, and fetch you up to supper."

"No—I can't get away. Honest, I can't. I've got a big load here—"

"None of that now. You've got to come."

"I can't do it, Mr. Banks. I would if I could."

"Well, I s'pose you know. But Frank

HIS LITTLE WORLD

will be along for you right after supper, anyhow."

Hunch walked quickly away. He was excited, and before returning to the schooner he strode a few blocks away from the river. He did not want his men to see him until he could get control of himself.

After supper he got out his good clothes and brushed them carefully. When young Banks drove down on the wharf and called to one of the men forward, Hunch was standing before his square tilted mirror, giving a last twist to his hair.

Mr. and Mrs. Banks were cordial. Mamie came in a little later, and Hunch was surprised to see how pretty she was. She had more flesh and color and her eyes were brighter. She acted as if nothing had happened, and before long Hunch was made to feel at home. When he rose



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POP-CORN BALLS

to go, Mr. Banks took his hat and followed him out, and Mamie looked a little conscious when she said "Good-night."

"You won't mind my telling you something, will you, Badeau?" said Banks, when they were on the side-walk. "I couldn't help seeing to-day that you didn't want to come around, and I—"

"Oh, it ain't that—"

"Hold on, now. I know just what it is. I ain't lived longer 'n you have for nothing. I see how you feel, and I just want you to know that we feel different. Of course, there's some things does make a difference, some kind of things—there's no getting around that—but all the same, we ain't holding anything against you. I'll tell you, Badeau—and I ain't ashamed to say it—when I found out how you'd been keeping my girl alive when I weren't man enough to do it my-

HIS LITTLE WORLD

self, I—why—dam' it, man, I want to shake hands with you, right now."

"Why," said Hunch, when Banks had released his hand, "that ain't so. I——"

"Now, you don't fool me. I know about it. Joe Cartier, he told me some of it, and Jim Bartlett and—by the way, there's a good friend of yours. He and Jess ain't never got over the way they treated you. Lord knows they'd be glad enough to crawl if you'd give 'em the chance. She's a good girl, too. Made a mistake when she threw you down, but she's suffered enough for that."

They walked for more than a block in silence. Finally Banks said, "Look here, Badeau; you can't go to-morrow. You just can't do it. You plan to get away the next morning, and come up to-morrow and set around, and we'll try to have a good time. Just to show that there ain't no hard feelings anywheres,

POP-CORN BALLS

and you can forget us if you want to, but you've got to put in one more evening, anyhow. Sometimes—sometimes I wonder if it ain't all just as well. Bruce, he wouldn't have—well, it wasn't your fault, anyhow."

When they parted a block further down the street, Banks said, "Mebbe we'll have a little surprise for you when you come to-morrow night. I can't say for sure, but it's more'n likely. And mebbe you won't be sorry you come."

Hunch had no doubts about staying. It would have taken more than the four Liddington tugs to have pulled him out of the harbor that next day. He went up to Bank's house early in the evening, and found the old gentleman alone in the front room in his shirt sleeves, popping corn at the stove.

"Come right in, my boy. The women folks drove me out of the kitchen. We

HIS LITTLE WORLD

thought we'd have some old-fashioned pop-corn balls. Hope you like 'em."

Hunch grinned and sat on the sofa.

"No setting around lazy. You've got to get to work along with the rest of us. Here, you shell them ears there, in the pan."

Hunch drew up a chair, and held the pan between his knees.

"Where's all the folks?" he said, as he started on his second ear.

"They're out in the kitchen, the whole lot of 'em. I told 'em we'd be out as soon as the corn was popped."

Mr. Banks spoke without looking around and in a nervous manner. He was watching the popper intently and he kept shaking it after the last yellow kernel had burst into white bloom. When Hunch grew a little impatient to go into the kitchen, Mr. Banks delayed and tried to keep up a conversation. At

POP-CORN BALLS

last, however, the corn was ready. Mr. Banks led the way to the kitchen door, opened it, and waited for Hunch to go through first. Mrs. Banks was greasing pans at the table; Mamie was in the pantry rattling the dishes. A tall girl stood at the stove stirring the candy, her back to the door. Hunch stopped a moment and looked at her. It was Jess Bartlett.

"Step lively, Badeau. This is our busy day." Mr. Banks brushed by him, holding the pan of pop-corn high up on his hand like a negro waiter, and trying to appear unconcerned.

"Come on, Mr. Badeau," called Mrs. Banks. "Just hold these pans a minute. We're going to make you work too."

Mamie came out of the pantry, blushing, and looked saucily at Hunch. He had not seen her look like that for more than a year. Then he knew that Jess had turned around and was looking at

HIS LITTLE WORLD

him. He sat on the corner of the table, and said, "Hello, Jess."

"Hello, John," she replied, in a low voice.

The others had turned away, but now Mr. Banks called out, "Pull up some chairs, folks. This is where we all get busy. Move lively, my boy. We've got to make the balls before it gets hard."

Hunch did not know how it happened that he sat next to Jess at the table. He felt strange and uncomfortable. But the others were full of mischief, and they joked slyly and winked at each other, and misinterpreted Hunch's backward manner, so that it was, after all, a lively evening. When it came time to go, Jess said to Mrs. Banks, "Guess I'll have to go along," and then lingered, not knowing whether she would have to go alone. Finally Mr. Banks said to Hunch, "I don't s'pose you'd mind just this once

POP-CORN BALLS

seeing that Jess gets home all safe and sound, would you, now?" So Hunch put on his coat, and he and Jess said "Good-night," and when they got out on the street, she timidly took his arm, and they walked along together without a word.

The silence continued until Hunch felt that he must say something.

"How've you folks been all this time?" he asked.

"We've been pretty well. Jim sprained his wrist, but it's all right now."

Again they were silent, and though Hunch tried, he could think of nothing more to say. They were on the last block of their walk, when Jess, her hand trembling a little on his arm, said:

"Haven't you ever forgiven me, John?"

It was a relief to him that she had broken the ice.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

“Why, I dunno. I ain’t got nothing special to forgive.”

“Are you mad now?”

“No, I ain’t mad.”

“You didn’t come around. It’s been a long time.”

Hunch had no explanation. They stood at the gate, each waiting for the other to go on. Jess turned half away and picked at a broken corner of the gate-post. Hunch watched her. There was something attractive in the poise of her figure, and even with her big hat on, enough of her hair showed to give an impression of its richness. She looked up at him.

“Ain’t we ever going to be—friends, John?”

“Yes, we’re friends now, I reckon.” Hunch hesitated; he was making up his mind to tell the truth.

“What makes you act like you do?”

POP-CORN BALLS

“Cause, well, ‘cause there ain’t no use patching up an old hull and calling it a new boat, Jess. Things is changed. There’s no good saying I feel like I did, when I don’t, Jess; and couldn’t if I tried. You’re a fine girl, and you’ll make some fellow happy, but I’m afraid I ain’t him.”

She stood looking down.

“Don’t you see how ‘tis, Jess? I’m just telling you the truth.”

She nodded? He held out his hand, and she took it quickly, then ran into the house. That was all. Hunch looked after her for a few moments, then he walked slowly back to the schooner.

CHAPTER XVII

OLD TIES

THE next day Hunch was moody. The men were afraid of him, and it was after a long time of bracing his courage, that the mate came up to where Hunch was sitting on the rail.

"Cap'n," he said, "she's all ready."

"I know it."

"Will we get under way? There's the tug coming in fifteen minutes."

Hunch sat still, his fingers locked, looking out across the harbor.

"Mike," he said, abruptly, "skip up to the office and telephone over for the tug to come to-morrow morning at seven o'clock."

"Not till to-morrow——?"

OLD TIES

"That's what I said."

The mate walked away, shaking his head.

Hunch was in a bad temper all the afternoon. After supper he sat in the cabin alone until after seven o'clock. Finally he got up and walked swiftly across town to Mamie's house. Mr. Banks opened the door, his coat on and his hat in his hand.

"Hello, my boy. This is a big surprise. Step right in. We thought you was up to Manistee by now."

"I thought I was going myself."

"Take off your coat—here, let me have it. How'd you manage it?"

"I—I found I couldn't get away."

"Ain't that fine, though. Mother, here's Mr. Badeau." Mrs. Banks was in the front room straightening her bonnet.

"How d'ye do?" she said, coming

HIS LITTLE WORLD

into the hall and shaking hands. "Glad to see you. Father and I was just starting for prayer-meeting."

"Go right along, Mis' Banks. Don't stay on my account."

"All right, if you'll excuse us. We won't be gone long, and I guess Mamie 'll take care of you all right. We can have our visit when we get back. Mamie—! Where is that child?"

"Here I am, mother," said Mamie, coming in from the kitchen. She greeted Hunch cordially.

"Good-by," said Mrs. Banks, "we'll be back 'fore long."

Mamie pulled up two chairs to the stove, Hunch helping her.

"How'd you happen to stay over?" she asked. "We weren't expecting you."

"No, I just made up my mind this morning."

"Well, I'm sure we're glad you did.

OLD TIES

It seems just like old times to have you back here."

"Don't it, though? I ain't had much chance to see my friends in the last year. I have to keep a-going all the time, you know."

"But I should think you'd kind of like it. Father told me how well you're doing. Isn't it fine."

"I dunno," said Hunch. "I ain't always sure I care much one way or the other."

"You mean about getting on? Oh, you mustn't talk like that. Of course you care, and all your friends care, too. We like to see you get ahead. Jess's brother told me when you got to be captain, and I was kind of proud of you."

The mention of Jess bothered Hunch, though he replied, "Was you really?" and tried to smile.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

Mamie was looking at him with a friendly expression in her eyes that he did not quite understand. He thought at first that she was laughing at him. But then she smiled, and said with a little hesitation:

"I didn't know but what you mightn't like what—the little surprise we had last night, you know."

"Oh, yes; I did all right."

"Well, but I thought afterward that maybe we oughtn't to have done it. It was father's idea. He feels real bad about—about you and Jess. And she's an awfully nice girl."

"Yes," said Hunch, "there ain't no doubt about that."

Mamie hesitated again, and then, when Hunch did not speak, they both became embarrassed.

"I've wondered sometimes, if you knew," she said at length, "if you really

OLD TIES

thought Jess was the only one to blame. It was just as much her folks—her brother, you know—he was worried about it, and he tried to keep her from going on with you."

"Yes, I know. He told me that."

"And I—don't you see how it is? You've both of you been two of the best friends I ever had, and I didn't like to see it—well, you know, don't you?"

She was looking into the fire as she spoke, and Hunch was watching her. She was very much in earnest.

"Don't you see?" she went on. "I couldn't help feeling kind of bad about it. Why can't you make it all right?"

She waited for him to answer, and at last looked up at him with a half smile.

"Why?" She asked again.

Hunch looked at her, almost fiercely, until she lowered her eyes to the stove.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

He got up, and walked to the window and back.

"Did you think it was her?" he asked, in a strange voice.

"Why—yes."

"Well, it wasn't. It was you."

Mamie lost a shade of her color and leaned back in her chair. Hunch stood looking down at her and he said again, "It was you, Mamie."

Mamie spoke without looking up.

"Oh, John," she said, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Then Hunch sat down and talked wildly, eagerly. And Mamie leaned back without a word, and looked at the brass ball on top of the stove and at the patterns on the wallpaper. Hunch was talking when a key rattled in the lock, and he sat stiff and constrained when Mamie's father and mother came into the room. He tried to stay and

OLD TIES

talk, but could not; and a few minutes later he said "Good-night," and went out into the hall. Mamie followed him, and without a word took down his ulster and helped him to get it on.

"Good-by," he said.

"Good-by, John. Don't be mad, will you? You know how much I care for you; and we'll be good friends, won't we, John?"

He bent down and whispered close to her ear, "I'm in for it now, Mamie. I ain't going to lose you now. Next time I come down I ain't going back without you."

Mamie smiled sadly, and shook her head. But she stood in the doorway watching him until he had passed into the darkness beyond the lamp-post on the corner.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HOUSE WITH THE SHINGLED FRONT

THE Fates kept Hunch from getting to Liddington again during the autumn, so he took to writing letters. He could not write what he would have said; his letters were stilted little notes, usually beginning with a phrase he had picked up from the office correspondence, "Yours of recent date is just at hand," or "Replying to yours of recent date," etc. Mamie wrote as impersonally, and through the autumn and on into the winter their letters told of nothing but incidental doings and happenings; but both were conscious of the sentiment that lay behind the effort of writing.

On the first day of December, when

THE SHINGLED FRONT

navigation on the lakes was closed, Hunch left the *Lucy Jackson* in her berth at the lumber wharf. For some weeks he had been thinking over a plan which he was now ready to carry out. He got Mr. Jackson to take a walk with him at noon, and they went up the river and looked at a piece of land. Mr. Jackson thought it would do, and on the next day it belonged to Hunch. He paid cash for it.

Through the winter months he was busy building a house. The plans came from an old copy of an architect's journal. Mr. Jackson sold him the lumber at inside rates, and Hunch rafted it up himself during a few days of open water. Bill Anderson, a carpenter whom he had known on the Liddington elevator, was hired, and together they built the house. Later, Hunch had to hire a plumber and a plasterer, but even after

HIS LITTLE WORLD

these expenses something was left of his year's earnings.

When January had come, and Hunch had not gone down to Liddington, Mamie could not help letting him see that she missed him. Once she wrote that she "guessed he didn't remember old friends very well." Hunch sat up half of one night reading the letter, but gave her no hint except that maybe he had a "little surprise" of his own.

The house fronted on the river. It was a story-and-a-half high, with four rooms and a hall on the ground floor and two small rooms upstairs. There was a grate in the front room, big enough for chunks of wood. The veranda extended the full width of the house. It would be a good place to sit evenings, when it was not too cold. The big white sand-hill that looked down on one side of the house may have been

THE SHINGLED FRONT

bleak enough, but Hunch had been brought up among sand-hills, and he liked it. It had a round bald top, and every morning during the summer the sun would strike it early and make it glisten. Hunch thought that maybe he would set out a few peach trees in the side yard some day.

It was on the twenty-seventh of February, a Saturday, that Hunch and Bill put the last brush of paint on the house. They sat down to rest on a saw-buck in the front yard, where they could admire the wide veranda and the shingled front.

“Who’s going to live here, now she’s done?” asked Bill.

“I am.” Hunch grinned.

“All alone?”

Hunch grew serious. The sense of achievement that had come with the building of the house had overbalanced

HIS LITTLE WORLD

his doubt about Mamie. He grew more serious, and paid no attention to Bill's questions.

They were cleaning up the brushes out in the woodshed, when Hunch suddenly pulled out his watch.

"Bill," he said, "you fix things up. I've got to go."

He caught a trolley car. At his room he hurriedly put on his good suit and white shirt. Then he ran for the station. At six-thirty he was in Liddington.

After supper at the hotel he walked up to Mamie's house. He had started out coolly, but suddenly, as he opened the gate, his strength seemed to leave him. He had reached the great moment of his life, and he vaguely knew it. He was so nervous that his hand was shaking when he knocked, and the things about him looked unnatural.

Mamie was nervous too; and though

THE SHINGLED FRONT

she talked easily enough for a while, and scolded Hunch because he had not been to see her all winter, she hardly knew what she was saying. Then came a time when neither had anything to say, and they sat for a long time without a word. Hunch's eyebrows were drawn together, almost fiercely.

"Say," he finally got out, "will you do something for me?"

"Why—I'll do anything I can."

"Well, I guess you can, all right. I want you to come up to Manistee with me to-morrow morning."

"Why—" she stammered, "I can't say now—it isn't—?"

"No," said Hunch, "you don't have to say nothing. I just want to show you something. We can be back before night."

Mamie looked relieved.

"What is it?" she asked slowly.

HIS LITTLE WORLD

"Nothing much—I ain't going to tell just yet. You'll come, won't you?"

"Why, I don't know—"

"Won't you?"

Mamie looked at him, hesitated, then laughed nervously, and nodded. She was a little frightened. Hunch grew almost boisterous in a sudden flow of good spirits, and he went away without a word which would make her understand.

They took the morning train. Mamie was herself again, and they appeared as quite a sober pair. Hunch, however, grew nervous as they came into Manistee. He hurried her into a trolley car, and sat stiff and silent while they skirted the flat shore of the lake and river. Finally, they got out and walked across the sand to a newly painted cottage next to a sand-hill.

Hunch looked at the house, and then at Mamie. She was puzzled.

THE SHINGLED FRONT

"Well," he said, "how do you like it?"

"What?" she said, though her eyes showed that she was beginning to understand.

"That there—the house. It's yours. I made it for you." He was so excited that he was raising his voice.

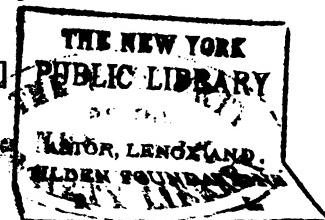
"S-sh," said Mamie, "somebody'll hear you."

Then she looked for a long time at the house. Hunch watched her, but she would not meet his eyes. She walked slowly up the yard, balancing on the planks that were laid on the sand. She rested a foot on the first step, and slowly looked around. There were tears in her eyes.

Hunch gripped her hand tightly.

"Oh, John," she faltered; but this time she did not say that she was sorry.

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